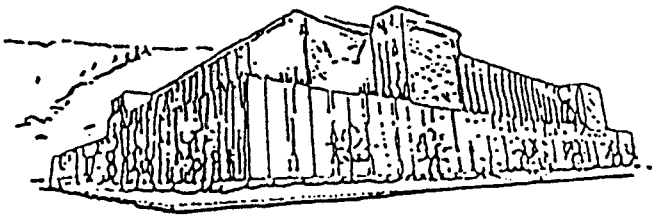
1997

Walk me Home| A story

Woody Beardsley
The University of Montana



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Walk Me Home
A Story

by
Woody Beardsley

B.A. Lewis and Clark College, 1986

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Science

The University of Montana

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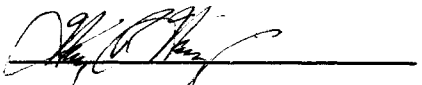

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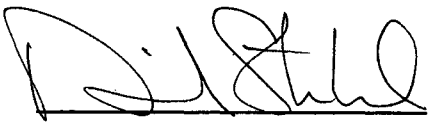

Dean, Graduate School

5-19-97

Date

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Missoula

I went to the supermarket, got a cart and proceeded to load it full of food. Starting in the first lane, the candy isle, I threw in twelve bags of mini Snickers bars, six boxes of Twix Singles and one Almond Joy for good measure. Across the isle was the powdered Gatorade drink mix where labels announced two gallons and a free scoop. I threw six containers into my cart. From there I wound through the store loading up on six and twelve of almost everything on my torn yellow list. I hit the pasta row, the peanut butter and jelly section, the breakfast cereal shelves, the crackers, canned-fish, brown sugar, plastic zip-lock baggies and plain black tea lanes before I finally found myself heading for the checkout isle.

Damn! There was a line. My plan had back-fired. I was not the only guy in Missoula, Montana who thought the twenty-four hour market would be empty at midnight. And because it was late, there was only one checkout open.

With the grace of a river barge brimming with wood-pulp, I eased my overloaded cart into line. There was a huge man, obese really, in the queue in front of me with a bag of chips and a quart of chocolate milk, no cart. He was wearing a gold double-knit blazer, the uniform of a national firm. Its royal crest read "your Real Estate neighbor." I have a deep, and irrational bad attitude towards real-estate brokers so I was going to try and ignore this guy. As he shelved the bow-hunting magazine and put his stuff on the black cashier's conveyor, he turned and glanced at my cart. A curious look of both interest and concern broke over his now ruddy face.

"You got kids?" he asked for both he and the gal now bagging groceries who seemed interested in my load.

"Me? Oh, no." I said kind of amused. "Just stocking up."

With that the store's night manager came up and said, "I can get you going over here" as he grabbed the front of my cart and eased me toward the next isle.

As I piled my goods on the spinning conveyor the large real-estate guy who was now leaving, stopped at the bagging end of the cashier's counter and picked up the conversation right where he'd left it.

"You know that's mostly junk food don't you?" He said pointing at the candy bars and the small mountain of sardine cans I loaded onto the conveyor.

"Yeah, but it's high in calories." I said being sure he'd note the irony in my voice.

"Yeeeess. Most junk food *is*. That's why it's called *junk* food." he said sarcastically trying to hide his impatience. He was dying to know what all this food was for, as now too were the store manager and the sack girl. But I held out.

"One man's trash is another man's treasure," I said stupidly then added "And besides I need the calories."

"What for? Hunting season doesn't start for four months."

"Well, I'm going on a long camping trip of sorts and I'm not going to have a chance to..."

"Where you going?" he interrupted.

"I'm walking to Denver." I said and for the first time really looked right at the guy. It made him a little uncomfortable.

"Colorado?" he asked as he shifted his glance at the cashier.

"Yep." I looked at the cashier too and he was grinning with delight. My mood picked up.

"Wow! That's great." he said "How long do you think it will take you? Are you hiking the Continental Divide?" I liked the store manager. He was a big help and he asked good questions.

"Yeah, I'll be trying to follow the divide, but I'm not exactly sure how long it will take. About nine weeks if I start here in Missoula. Eight if I start on Chief Joseph Pass." He kept

busy passing items over the checkout laser beam. The big real-estate guy stayed right where he was. He was listening and now he looked incredulous. My mood dipped again.

"I hope you're planning on taking more than *this*. This will *never* be enough food." And before I could respond he just kept on and said, " You know you can get this stuff in bulk. You'd save a lot of money and you wouldn't have to deal with all the packaging. If I were going on a hike like that, I'd buy everything in bulk. And I'd get a bunch of freeze-dried food too."

"Uh huh." I said, trying not to look at him.

"You know they make this camping stuff that comes ready-to-eat, just add water. You can get spaghetti dinners, lasagna, beef stew. I like the eggs. You know you can have freeze-dried eggs for breakfast, or pancakes. They even come with syrup."

As he droned on and on, he was sure I was listening but my mind was screaming.

Who is this guy? Should I tell him I've already bought all my bulk foods at the Good Food Store? Do I tell him this stuff is cheaper and will make packing easier? Should I tell him I'd rather starve than buy any of that trendy, expensive, freeze-dried, yuppie, camping gruel in the shinny mylar bags? Should I tell him how much I hate grocery stores? How they make me claustrophobic and anxious about all the crap we consume? How I was sure the ocean of cardboard in this store alone was pushing us all into an extinction vortex? Should I tell him that what and how I decide to spend my summer is my own damned business and that the last thing in the world I was worried about was that some overweight land-shark in a goddamned gold blazer thought I was buying junk food?

No.

I held my tongue. Instead, I lied.

"Nope. This is all the food I'm taking for three months." I said and added, "But I'm carrying a fly rod and a sling-shot. I hope to eat trout and grouse all the way to Denver." I smiled really big. "All this stuff is just back-up. It'll keep me from feeding on tourists."

The store manager laughed and the big man turned toward the door and said, "Well good luck." He slung his little plastic bag over his shoulder and huffed, "Whatever you do, don't starve to death!"

I kind of laughed with the cashier and started to write out a check. He was still grinning, and I took it he was sympathetic to my cause. Then turning back to his interest in my plans he matter of factly said "You'll be using skis or snowshoes."

What? I thought to myself. Then I realized he was speaking about all the weather we'd been getting. It was the middle of May and we were having the wettest Spring in years. Chief Joseph Pass, about 90 miles south of Missoula, had gotten 18 inches of snow just the day before.

"Oh, well, if the snow-pack is still high when I start, I'll be taking shoes."

I only partially lied. I didn't say *snow* shoes. He was not the first person to recognize the obvious dilemma of snow travel, but it was a detail I had for one reason or another been avoiding intentionally. I knew my pack would be heavy and I was trying to make believe I wouldn't be needing such "extras" as snow shoes or skis. No matter how good-natured or well-intended the store manager's interest in my trip was, I left the place feeling tired and somewhat agitated. I loaded my supplies into the back of my car with rain soaking my neck. I slammed the tail gate, shoved the cart into the dark oblivion of the mostly empty parking lot and got in behind the wheel.

> **5/15/95, Cinco de Mayo**
> Having second thoughts about my trip. It snowed again on Lost Trail Pass. What were you thinking about when you decided to do this hike to Colorado?

That trip to the store was the first event which confirmed in my mind that I was really going to spend the summer hiking to Colorado. Prior to that it had been a lot of talk and some logistical planning that didn't commit me to anything. But between the food in my car and the sacks of rice, beans, corn meal, and cous cous I had back at the house, I had a $250 hole in my

bank account saying "let's go." And while such an investment may seem minimal, it is serious business since I had spent the entire Spring turning away good summer job opportunities while planning a glorified camping trip. So I was pretty serious about going because the prospect of spending the summer mowing lawns in Missoula just wasn't going to cut it with my thesis committee.

Oh. I forgot to mention. This walk was also a big part of my being able to get out of graduate school. I am a student at the University of Montana in the Masters program for Environmental Studies, also known as EVST. Somehow I talked the department and my committee into thinking that this hike of mine was a good idea. I told them I would keep a journal and that I'd come back in the Fall and write a paper about "walking home." This may seem a little unconventional for a university program but is by no means a strange thing at EVST. I tell people it's kind of like an activist training camp in the hopes that they'll perceive the department's reputation; which is to say it's not at all like other graduate schools.

For over twenty years the EVST department has immersed itself and its students in the ugly business of understanding and trying to do something about the planet's environmental condition, which can be daunting, thankless and depressing work when you consider the glaring facts at hand. Deforestation, ozone depletion, habitat destruction, despeciation, human population growth and overall resource consumption are occurring at rates that will soon leave us all begging for water and bashing each other's heads in. So perhaps you can understand the great generosity or at least good faith that the EVST professors have in telling one of their students it's OK to walk out across the Great American Desert for eight weeks. As if to say, "What the hell? Maybe you'll see a burning bush." All I could say is God bless them. We don't call it EZST for nothing.

Denver, Colorado

I keep making reference to "walking home" yet have made it clear that I live in Missoula, Montana. Some may have figured out that I am originally from Denver, Colorado and have yet to get over calling where I grew up 'home'. Funny, it seems odd that no matter how much I like living in Montana, I can't get over the fact that home is in Colorado. I suppose the difference between the two lies somewhere in my mind and in the limits I put on my imagination. I left home because I did not know how to behave there. I left home because I did not know how to watch it grow and change into something I did not recognize or could not love. Yet home is where I want to be. Which is to say Denver, or Colorado, or some vague memory of what they once were.

You see I grew up in the city on a ranch. Seems kind of absurd, conjuring up the image of a great in-holding in the middle of Denver, Colorado but it's true. Those familiar with the West and our particular method of mobile existence might recognize a mutual feeling of unbridled privilege. Of having your cake and eating it. A schizophrenic mindset borne of the automobile that comes with living in America and maybe in particularly the West. Where every one is a cowboy.

It started with an early obsession with cowboys. When I was a small boy my mother read to me a children's story called EL Vaquero Pequeno. We are not Spanish but the book was, and it had both English and Spanish versions printed on opposite sides of the simple red ink illustrations. The English title read Cowboy Small.

It was a children's parody of the great Cervantes classic Don Quixote. Instead of an old man and a pudgy side-kick traveling the Spanish countryside it was the story of a little boy and his nagging mother on an average day in the suburbs. Enamored with the wild-west, the child's imagination, rivaling any Conquistador's, could turn a shopping cart into a covered

wagon, or a tricycle into a trusty steed. And just as our hero would be about to shoot a rattlesnake from behind a bush, or rescue the fair maiden in distress, like pudgy old Sancho, Mom would waddle onto the scene and reality would turn the snake into a dirty sock; the maiden into a cat. Humility comes hard in the west.

My mother read it to me so many times I had the story line memorized. She got into the habit of reading it in Spanish and I even believe I understood all the words. Mom would kneel on the floor with her elbows on the edge of my bed and the book propped up in front of her. The Spanish would roll right off her tongue and her dark eyes would glint the bright happy smile I knew she held for me. And each night, every time she read it, before she tucked me in, she would always end it the same. "Buenas noches Vaquero Pequeno. Sweet dreams Cowboy Small."

Then one day, like a bedtime story come true, my family bought a ranch. It was located half-way between Denver and Colorado Springs in country that is best described as where the mountains meet the plains. It is best described that way because that's where it was. My two sisters and I met most of our seven cousins there in the wind. And it was there we discovered our grandfather, a kind handsome man we called Pops. He was an old time cowboy who wore a gray cattleman's Stetson and brown low-heeled boots. His best friend in the world was a tall black horse he called Brother and he taught us to talk to him in quiet praising tones. George Lee Beardsley, he was my namesake and I was sure I'd grow up to be just like him.

Not long after my family bought the ranch my little brother was born in full western garb; boots, hat, and chaps. I picture him in the hospital delivery room, hat floppy and dripping with after-birth, his little chaps clinging to his tiny pink legs. I imagine the nurse's surprise at encountering such a creature and her gently tugging off his brown Tony Lamas to make the required footprint. Within two weeks of getting him home from the hospital he'd grown spurs and a six-gun holster. El Vaquero Pequeno. We naturally called him "Duke." A cowboy savant. It's as if he arrived in this world cognizant of our ethos and set out confidently to play up the myth.

In fact we all played hard at that myth. As children we did what kids do like play in the creek and swing in the barn. And we learned to ride, and move cattle, fix fence, buck hay and otherwise be good hands; something we learned to call "playing cowboy." You see, none of the family actually lived on the ranch. It was never a source of our family's income and like most ranches it barely paid for itself. But the difference between a working ranch and a recreational one can be subtle, especially for a little kid. Because when you are six years old you do not hear nor would you understand discussions of down payments, mortgages and the other realities that make such a place possible. You are only psyched to be there.

We drove the fifty five miles out of town nearly every weekend. Come Friday afternoon all six of us would pile in the station wagon with clothes and food for two days stuffed into duffel bags and coolers. It never took us long to get out of the city and there always seem to be a relief about us as we got further and further out of town. Looking back on it now I realize the ranch was really just a distraction from the city. It allowed us time away from the stress and pressure of Denver which was growing by leaps and bounds. It allowed us time in the outdoors away from man made things. It allowed us time to be together as a family. It allowed us time to dress up and wear a hat and look handsome on the back of a pretty horse. It allowed us to imagine ourselves as something other than we really were.

But as I got older I guess I and much of the family grew away from that place. I have thought a lot about it and wondered if it weren't all the driving back and forth that did it. I wonder if there wasn't something about moving through the countryside at fifty five miles an hour driving from one distraction to the other that ultimately alienated us from both. As if the endless sky along the front range weren't enough of a distraction itself. There is something perturbing about the way I took the ranch for granted and I think my attitude came from all the driving back and forth.

One weekend became much like the next . Get in the car, drive to the ranch. Exult in the out of doors for two days. Get in the car, drive back. Stop at McDonalds on Colorado Blvd. Eat a Big Mac and a large fries. Drink a coke. Drive home. School in the morning. I am sure

the drives back to town each Sunday night are what taught me to hate the city or at least the expansive growth in the suburbs. Each trip home seemed marred by a new building or freeway and even as a boy I was angered by what I saw. Every time the landscape was altered I felt like some part of my memory were erased. Like some part of what my grandparents once knew was lopped off and no longer mattered. Just gone.

I am also sure it was the driving back and forth that taught me to see the folly of weekend ranching. Of dressing up like Halloween and playing ride 'em cowboy for two days and then going back to town and attending to city affairs. I went away to college, and only got back to the ranch on an occasional weekend off during summer breaks. Even then though I was old enough to know better I got sucked in. We built a roping arena in the low wash below the house and every weekend of the summer and even weeknights after work we chased on horseback the slow corriente steers with the crooked horns that ran with their heads ducked down. I was disdainful of my own behavior but had no idea how to stop it. I no longer admired nor aspired to be a cowboy. I started to see them as uneducated insecure red necks that hide behind their western costume and myth of independence.

It is hard to lump twenty odd years into one ball and explain what happened. All I know was that I grew restless and angry towards so much that was happening around me. After college I drifted in and out of different jobs and interests. I dabbled in politics, was a ski patrolman one winter, traveled to Europe and lived in Spain one summer. I took a job with a partner of my father's in California. And while I always felt lucky to have such opportunities available to me, none of them seemed to be what I wanted. I did not know what to do with all that privilege and I found myself rebellious and disgruntled and ready to tear the head off all the world.

The fact that my father was a real-estate developer didn't help my situation. I couldn't very easily go to him and explain how I felt because it always seemed like I was attacking him or blaming him. Financially he made a very successful business out of overseeing and promoting the development of Colorado. Early in his career he was involved in resort

development at places like Vail and Copper Mountain. Later on he and partners built downtown office buildings and business parks in the Denver suburbs. His success in business is what clothed and fed me. It paid for my schooling. It paid for my health. It paid for the ranch. It paid for gas and cars and ski lift tickets and just about everything I ever did. He is intelligent and thoughtful and fair and is more honest than anyone I have ever known. But the fact that I am fundamentally opposed to the work he does has nearly driven me mad.

After a while I found myself living in Denver working for a large environmental organization called the Wilderness Society. I got paid good money to travel around the state lobbying and organizing people for the protection of wildlands. But to me it felt like nothing more than a guilt-free yuppie job service. My life style hadn't changed and I still felt powerless to do anything about it, much less affect anything in the outside world. It made me angry and frustrated to see Interstates be built and the houses fly up and the condominiums fill the spaces I once knew and even thought I loved. But I was a hypocrite. I hated every other car in traffic except mine. I was profoundly immature and wanted to have the same kind of tangible impact my father had on the world only in reverse. I wanted to undo every goddamn wasteful insensitive eyesore in the state and I wanted it done now!

Late one night around 2:00 in the morning a friend and I rode our bikes through the parking garage of the new Cherry Creek Shopping Mall in Denver. It was scheduled to open the following week. I found a can of safety-orange spray paint left out by construction workers and proceed to write "Fuck This Mall" in bright neon letters on the white stucco walls of the Lord and Taylor department store. When the paint ran out we broke into the mall and rode our bikes up and down the big hall skidding tires and leaving long black streaks on the new marble floors. We broke widows and tipped over scaffolding making a destructive mess of things until we thought we heard someone coming and rode away in a panic. The opening of the Mall was delayed a week while workers sandblasted clean our drunken graffiti and the Mayor of Denver had to rearrange his busy schedule. This was not the prank of some fifteen year old vandal, nor

disgruntled high school punk out late getting kicks. I was twenty-seven years old and had a well paying-job with a respectable environmental organization.

In truth I had only been doing environmental work a few months when we pulled that puerile stunt. Mostly I had been employed for two years as a real-estate developer in Southern California building shopping centers. Perhaps that little late night foray was my way of breaking off from the work I had been doing as a developer. My way of saying, "Fuck off, I am not doing this any more." I was finding it increasingly difficult to live in Denver and I wasn't sure why. Maybe because I was too close to my parents, but also because I was not exactly ashamed of my destructive behavior. Mostly I couldn't stand the terrible anxious feeling I got living there watching it change. It was a little like watching someone you love slowly die and I just couldn't take it any longer. I needed out.

So I moved to Montana where I knew things were different. Or at least I told myself they were. I spent a year in Bozeman, Montana, getting paid to talk to people about the plight of the grizzly bear and the rapid loss of their habitat. During that time Galatin County, the county Bozeman is located in was listed as one of the top ten fastest growing counties in the country. It seemed there was not a week that went by that a new subdivision didn't spring up on the edge of town. The following year I had moved to Missoula, Montana to attend the University and pursue my interests in the environment. Things were much the same there. In fact four of the ten fastest growing counties in the country were all right there where I lived.

Western Montana has suffered from a bout of national popularity and subsequently it has found itself wrestling with growing-pains. Many of the small cities and towns in the western half of the state have been inundated by new comers like me moving in. The traditional economies on which these towns were founded, timber, mining, agriculture are losing favor because us new people moving in don't like them. We move here because it is a nice place to live and we don't want to see clearcuts and mining pits and dead streams. New comers move to places like Missoula, Montana, because there is a quality of life there they cannot find in the big cities. Schools are small and good. Housing is relatively affordable and the advent of the

computer, the fax machine allowed many people to work right at home. So they are bringing their jobs with them Anyway that is what all the political and economic experts are saying. To me it is just an old tired story because the same thing happened to Denver while I was growing up there. It is the process of sub urbanization and I hate it. Leaving Denver I escaped nothing.

And walking home was not going to fix any of it. Not that I didn't possibly hang onto some remote hope that it would. I did not believe that my journey would solve my problems or even settle my mind, as if once I got there I would find myself, my time, my place. That would be too easy. It also would be too simplistic and nauseatingly sentimental. I like to think of it as a work in progress. I told myself that what counts was the journey itself and that maybe walking across Wyoming would be enough, that home could be anywhere no matter where I reside. Yeah, right. Mostly I just think I have for a long time wanted to spend an extended period of time outside alone, moving at a pace for which I was perhaps intended. A pace which for all but the last century people have always traveled. On my own two feet.

Chief Joseph Pass

May 21, 1995, Last Food Day
Almost killed this real-esate guy at the store tonight. He was sticking his nose into my business. What do I care? I guess I'm just sorry that I am so dependent on the store for my food. I suppose I've harbored romantic notions of hunting and gatehring my way to Colorado like Lewis and fucking Clark. Give it a break, Woody.

I am still trying to understand the irritation I was feeling that night on my way back from the grocery store. In my mind I was committed; financially, scholastically and psychologically. So what was the problem? I was all tense driving home and I'd been so irritated by the real-estate agent and his nosy questions that you'd think I was having second thoughts. I suppose my real problem was anxiety. Call it fear. I look back now and think that if I hadn't been at least a little afraid I would have been in trouble. As it was, I was semi-terrified and that was trouble enough. The only thing I could do was suck it up and get a move on.

The next morning I got up early and without bothering to eat any breakfast I went out to the car and brought the brown bags of food into the house. In an empty room recently vacated by a house mate I proceeded to divvy up all my things into six even piles on the floor. One pile was the food I would start with, the other five I was sending in boxes addressed to myself at locations along my route. I knew from a rough count of section lines on U.S. Forest Service and U.S.G.S. maps that it is approximately 1200 miles from Chief Joseph Pass, Montana to Berthod Pass, Colorado along the Continental Divide. I also knew my sister was getting married on August 26th at my parent's home in Colorado. Since I was planning on starting on June 12th, that left me roughly ten weeks or seventy days to get to my sister's wedding. It was easy to see how I'd need to cover 120 miles a week or approximately 17 miles a day on average to make it there on time. Now I also knew in advance that I can feasibly carry all my camping gear and enough

food for ten to twelve days before needing to re-supply. So I wouldn't need to break it down into ten seven day spurts but rather seven ten day spurts or better yet six 12 day sections. Preparing for such a trip is an inexact science. The fewer times I'd have to re supply the better.

I have a friend, Dave Havelick who hiked from Mexico to Canada on the Continental Divide five years ago. It was Dave who continued to encourage me as I talked the idea through my head. It was Dave who seemed intrigued with the idea that I might try making this hike without using maps and then who laughed with me when I decided that was a ridiculous idea after all. It was also Dave who lent me his many maps and notes of routes through some of the trickier sections.

Dave told me it took he and his friends two months to cover the same section of the Divide. I reminded myself that Dave is a marathon runner and glutton for physical punishment. He told me they averaged twenty two miles a day. Which didn't sound like too much at first. Then I considered the mountainous terrain, a seventy-five pound pack, and the fact that I'd have to sustain that pace for weeks on end and quite possibly much of it alone. I lowered my sights and figured on ten weeks instead of eight.

The night before I left there was a little party at my friend Twilly's house. With the help of my girlfriend, Sarah, I had gotten all my boxes to the post office and my gear was essentially together so I figured I might as well go whoop it up for one last time. There was lots of tequila and plenty of beer. I told my friends I needed a haircut before I left. So with some desk scissors, a pocket knife, and a Bic disposable razor five extremely drunk and animated environmental activists began to carve a model U.S. Forest Service timber sale on my head. The top was clipped very short and a patchwork of tiny clearcuts were shaved from ear to ear. Up the back of my skull a jagged line zig-zagged dangerously from my neck to the clearcuts. My very own logging road. When the party proceeded into town I wore a collegiate T-shirt that read Psychotic State into the bar. The hardcore pool hustlers and barflies might have been disturbed by my appearance and made quick room for us at the table. We shot lousy pool.

Needless to say we didn't get the crack of dawn start I had hoped for the next day. It was noon before my friend Tom and I loaded our packs into his station wagon and drove off from town. Both of our girlfriends accompanied us to the trailhead on Chief Joseph Pass. There was a jovial send off. One of the girls brought a bottle of non-alcoholic sparkling juice. We popped the cork and took pictures of us kissing good-bye by the road sign. Then Tom and I proceeded up a jeep trail that doubled as a creek. Six inches of water ran down the muddy ruts, an early sample of what would prove to be a slow and wet first week.

> **6/11/95, Sunday, Day before departure**
> Thought about where I'll be tomorrow up on the west side of the Big Hole. I thought about Merriweather Lewis' journal entry when he was in the Big Hole on his 30th birthday back in 1804-05(?). Was amazed at how sad he was and how little he thought of himself and what he'd accomplished by the time he was thirty years old. Strange reading that entry and then recently learning some historians believe he committed suicide a few years later. Poor bastard.

As I look back on them the first two weeks were both the hardest and easiest of the trip. Hardest because I was not yet in shape and the weather was bad, but easiest because it was fun and exciting getting started. A lot like an adventure. The food seemed new if not interesting. My friend Tom Platt had agreed to spend the first ten days out with me. His coming along lent a casual and familiar tone to the beginning of the trip which otherwise may have seemed too big an undertaking if I were alone. So the beginning of an eight week 1180 mile trek down the Continental Divide seemed just another week out camping with my friend. Which is exactly what it was.

Right away we both started making dramatic, exaggerated complaints about our situation. We groaned heavily under massive packs and made an extra effort to curse the deep snow. Our snow shoes were only semi-useful and they seemed more trouble than they were worth. We were staggering through thigh deep slush on the first or second day when I said, "Good thing we don't have to hike in the snow."

"Better still, our packs are so light." Tom offered.

"Nothing worse than carrying a heavy pack in deep snow."

"Oh, it could be worse. It could be...."

"It *is* raining, *Dude*."

"Now did I say anything about rain. No, I think not."

Our sarcasm was an effort to make light of the situation. Neither of us was pleased with the conditions.

The West Bighole is spectacular country with views into the Bitterroot range and Central Idaho. Normally you can see for miles from the top of the range but we saw little the first two days as it was socked in with weather. We carried a very small two-man tent that the two of us barely fit into. It was easy for one person to set up while the other started the stove.

I was experimenting with a wood burning Zip stove that I brought to keep from having to carry fuel. It is an ingenious little contraption as light and convenient as any conventional backpacking stove. It has a little double-walled fire box that sits above a battery powered fan. You fill the box with wood, start a little fire in the box and after a minute or so set your pot or pan on top to cook. It burns as hot as you want it to as long as you keep it stoked with fuel.

Small twigs and sticks, pine cones, bark, needles, sage brush, cow shit; pretty much anything will burn in it. It took us a time or two to get the art of lighting it down but we quickly figured out how to get it going. We joked how much it would suck if the weather was bad all summer and I couldn't find any dry fuel. Ha! Ha! As it turned out, once we got a fire going in it anything would burn wet or dry. So all I needed to do was keep a small stash of dry starter twigs with the stove and wet weather wouldn't prove a problem.

One thing I was seriously worried about on that first week was my feet. I had realized back in April that I would be relying on my feet to get me to Colorado and so I'd taken great pains to thoroughly break-in a pair of hiking boots before I left. I was still getting over the last pair of blisters when I discovered a magic sock combination that seemed to work. One thin

layer against the skin, one thick layer against the boot. As it turned out my feet were holding up well.

Tom unfortunately didn't share my luck and by the third day out with our feet soaking from slogging through wet heavy snow, he had worn blisters in the heels, toes, and bottoms of his feet. They were pale and pock marked and looked quite painful when he pulled off his wet socks. The next morning over granola and hot Gatorade, he turned to me and said, "Woodrow. Much as I'd like to continue, I'm going to do the reasonable thing and bail out."

"I thought that might be coming," I said.

"Between the rain and the blisters on my feet, well, I'd be hard pressed proving to myself that I am having a good time."

"No big deal" I said, realizing I'd be heading off across southwestern Montana by myself until I got to West Yellowstone. "I was getting tired of your sorry ass anyway."

Tom laughed and then said, "Sorry man."

"Ah hell, I'll be fine. More room in the tent." I said, and then added. "You got to promise to take some of this heavy shit with you though." The thought of additional weight in my pack was daunting. They were heavy enough as it was and we'd split the cooking gear tent and stove between us. Now I'd have to carry that stuff alone. Neither one of us could imagine what he might take of mine that I didn't need but he said "No sweat. We'll lighten the bastard up."

The next day we walked down out of the Big Hole at a place called Twin Lakes. There is a Forest Service road that reaches the high lakes and we walked down it and out into the open expanse that is the Big Hole by the light of the full moon. It was beautiful and both of us appreciated the change from slow mountain walking. We threw our bags behind two trees on the edge of a huge hay meadow and fell asleep for the first time yet under the stars.

In the morning we walked all the way into the little town of Jackson where there is a modest little hotel with a hot springs. By the way we carried on about cheese burgers and beer and soaking in the pool you'd have thought we'd been out on the trail for two months. But this

was day six and while I soaked in the pool Tom called Suzanne his girlfriend to come and pick him up.

As it turned out my girlfriend Sarah joined Suzanne and the two of them joined us that evening at the Hotel for New York Steaks and a nice bottle of Merlot. It was Tom's treat as he felt bad for leaving me on my own. That night we drove back out to a nearby trailhead on the south end of the Big Hole and camped in the rain. In the morning we had our second Bon Voyage celebration at a picnic bench before the three of them piled in the car and drove away. It was day seven and I hiked back up to the Bitterroot Divide and spent the night alone in the rain.

The Beaverhead

Day fourteen I discovered I left my tent poles at my previous camp site. The most grueling day so far of the trip, I'd hiked 18 miles on and off the divide covering about 6500 feet of vertical through snow, mud, bugs, and heat. It was one of those wonderful evenings when I was so wrung-out from the day's efforts that I could only sit and look at my pack and think about cooking dinner. The weather was glorious. A wonderful high pressure out of the Basin states to the southwest had delivered the first two consecutive days of crystal clear skies. As I pulled myself together, set my stove up and began to pitch my tent when it dawned on me I didn't have the poles (Up till then I packed them separately) "Oh shit!" I thought to myself. "I'll have to go back and get them."

There are a whole swirl of things that go through your mind when something like that happens. I started to give myself endless shit and proceed to point out that this was just another in a long line of glaring examples why I'm not fit for life on the planet. But I just didn't have the energy for such nonsense. I had to sit back down and stare at my uncooked dinner and laugh. There wasn't anything else to do. And when I was done laughing I started to think about solving my dilemma.

There are things you can accidentally walk away from and decide to do without, like bug dope or sun-block, and then there are things you just can't. Tent poles are one of those things and it was only the fortune of good weather that kept this from being a serious situation. What annoyed me most was that I knew right where they were. I remembered making a mental note that morning to not forget them. At first glance it seems like no big deal. Take the extra day and walk back and get them. But in terms of progress I thought I needed to be making, amount of

food I was carrying, people I had to meet, a day back to get them is really two days behind on the trail.

So I got out my Beaverhead Forest map to look at the Nicholia creek valley, the most southwestern part of Montana. It appeared that there were at least three or four big ranches, one of them right at the bottom of the drainage I was camped on. I would go down in the morning, ask them for a ride over to my poles, thank them when I was done and only be a half a day behind schedule. Simple. What is amazing to me now is indeed how brutally simple it was.

I had to walk about six miles to get to the first ranch. It was a lovely morning and I'd gotten up earlier than normal to deal with my problem. There was a heavy layer of dew on the broad green hay meadows of the valley and acres of lavender shooting stars were the wildflower of choice here. It is frustrating to leave the trails of mountain hiking for the more open walking along dirt roads. There is something about the scale, about being able to see all the five miles you've got ahead of you to walk. It is like watching a clock and can become very frustrating, especially with a heavy pack. About a half a mile ahead of me there was someone riding fence lines or ditches on a red four wheeler. I could see the telltale roll of orange ditch-tarp sticking up behind the rider. Every time I thought I was going to get close enough to this guy to explain my dilemma he'd start his scooter up and buzz a couple of hundred yards down the road and stop again. This went on for at least three miles (about an hour). Finally as I approached a fork in the road he zoomed off to a ranch in the wrong direction and I never saw him again.

I finally found myself in a large, beige, metal workshed talking down at pair of irrigation boots sticking out from under a huge HESTON tractor. A grease-covered form in coveralls didn't more than glance out from under at me as I told him my predicament and how I could sure use some help.

"You'll have to ask the boss."' the feet said. "Over at the house."

The house was one of those double wide trailer homes with siding that made it look like a house. But it was landscaped nicely with petunias and marigolds in the wagon-wheel planter and it looked and felt like any other ranch house. Before I could knock on the door a stocky 45ish looking woman in baby blue wranglers and a pink snap front western shirt came through the door. She was wearing a red kerchief over her curlers and seemed a little surprised to see me there. She was on her way out. I was in my standard attire, dirty white cotton pants, blue T-shirt, scraggly growth of beard and a camouflaged hat covering my spotty buzz-cut. Before I could start explaining my dilemma she just shook her head and said "you'll have to take it up with the spouse."

And before she left in a hurry she stuck her head back in the door and bellowed "Father, Someone out front here to see you!" and then she told me that if he didn't show up in a few minutes to walk around behind the house where I'd find the door to his office. "He's on the phone." And then she left. I never saw her again.

I waited for a minute or two and then to kill time I took off my pack and leaned it against the old hand pump water spigot decorating the garden which looked like it worked. I was just noting to myself that it was clearly the nicest day so far of the summer, when out walked a grizzled looking man dressed for winter. He had on brown insulated coveralls, a down vest over a blue front zippered sweat shirt, a parka, and a greasy blue and red-checked hay haulers hat. He was standing in his socks looking so put out I thought he would spit. He had a gray beard that was trimmed like a Quaker or an Amish might keep it but I couldn't really tell because he hadn't shaved in weeks.

"Problem?" was all he said from behind his tinted reading specs.

I started to grin.

"Well, yes sir." I said trying to be serious.

"My names is Woody Beardsley," I advanced and shook his hand, "I'm from Missoula, Montana and I've spent the last twenty days or so walking here from there. Been walking the Divide." I looked to see if he was listening. "And, well, you see as much as I hate admitting it,

when I got to my camp last night up here above your place on Nicolai Creek?" I gestured over my shoulder. "Well, I discovered, believe it or not, that I went and left my tent poles back at my last camp." I shook my head and looked down at my feet. Then I looked up at him and gave him a big grin.

While I am aware of the fact that I was trying to charm this guy into helping me out, I have to reiterate there was not a I really meant what I was saying and I was just laying it out for him. He could do as he so chose, but I was reaching out. I was being as genuine as I know how to be.

"Well, shit." He said about semi-disgusted, "You're really in a world of hurt." And then he just stood there and there was this long awkward moment of silence.

Not knowing what to do I said, "You can't imagine how embarrassed I am in admitting this. It took all the courage I could muster just to come in here. But you see, if I take a day to walk back there and another to return I'll be two or three days behind and I only have so much food and there are some people I'm supposed to meet in West Yellowstone in a week and I don't have anyway of getting ahold of them." I had to breath. I looked him right in the eye "And so I was wondering if you could possibly take me over or let me borrow a truck so I can get my poles."

"That's it?" He said, "You know we've got a ranch to run. If we had to stop and help every fella out who thought he'd walk to Canada or some such nonsense we'd never get anything done."

I was stunned for a moment. I thought for sure my goose was cooked and was about to say how "I know you folks are incredibly busy and I can pay you gas money and your time," when he told me to take off my shoes and come in while he figured out what to do. I followed him in the front door.

There, not three feet from the threshold of the front entrance was the large head of a six-point mule deer buck. It was mounted in a cautious "hunting-pose", head turned and ducked. It's dark black eyes glared right at me, or whoever walked in the door. I could have touched it

with my tongue it was so close. It was mounted right above the big easy chair that sat not three feet in front of the huge 30-inch television console and hung so close overhead I was sure whoever watched the tube from that chair had to slouch.

Across the room was a big ample couch with plastic covering the new appolstry. Above one end of the couch was the head of a huge bull elk, at least a seven point, and it was mounted in an action pose similar to the mule deer only this elk was in full rut. The taxidermist had done a shoddy job and the tongue, lips and teeth all glared in a less than lifelike flaring of pink gums. Mock Bugling. On the other end of the couch was another mule deer head, this one in a less dramatic pose than the first. But after a second curious glance it became clear something was wrong. The antlers looked like some kind of freak accident for cows horns. They were all bent and twisted and looked as if the deer spent the season under a hideous power-line and its antlers had just melted that way.

Between the two former ungulates was an awkward five-foot tall glass case, also mounted on the wall, and in it was a pair of stuffed rough-side-out hair chaps. Cowboy chaps. There was a big rodeo buckle at the waist I never got the nerve up to read. The chaps were wearing boots and looked like a display at the Cowboy museum in Cody, Wyoming.

On the large dinning table in the middle of the room were three dark brown elk feet cut off at the knee and bound together to form what I am sure their creator thought was an attractive table piece; like a vase or something. On the opposite wall were the heads of great cats. For sure a mountain lion, two bobcats and I think a lynx. I have been in lots of ranch houses in my life and some of them have been marvels of domestic taste, but this man's house takes the cake.

I think my host noticed me looking around the room because he started telling me about the ranch. I found out he'd bought it just four years prior and that he was trying to make a go of it in the cattle business.

"Yep. Been in construction all my life over in CouerD'alene Idaho, but I always wanted to be a rancher. So when it was time to retire I decided I'd buy this place and go into the cattle

business." He just sat there and looked disgusted. He told me how he spent the last winter out there living in a camper while the previous owners showed him how to feed the cattle and keep the place running. I thought of how brutally cold it must get there in the winter at six thousand feet two hours drive from Dillon, Montana. And I thought of this crusty old wannabe out there feeding cows in the wind. Realizing he had just told me his life's greatest dream and had said it with such utter contempt disgust in such a cantankerous manner that all I wanted to do was cry for him.

He told me his name was Gilbert Little and he gave me his card. When I noted his partner was a big California financial company, he told me, "There is always more than one way to skin a cat." Which I took to mean that there was no way in hell he'd ever been able to afford to buy the ranch and so he'd gone and found a partner that could.

I didn't tell him that when I'd walked over the divide from Idaho and first seen his valley two days ago I was struck by how remote, amazingly beautiful, and wild place it was. And how I almost automatically thought the Nature Conservancy or some like organization should step up and buy Gilbert's and the three other ranches that make up the private portions of the valley. How such ownership would give them enough clout with the Forest Service that the whole thing could be run like a nature preserve. Of course, I didn't know Gilbert then, and I wasn't thinking that people with that kind of money to give away are few and far between.

Gilbert was nervous about letting me go back in one of his trucks to find my tent poles. Mostly because he was weary of angering his neighbors. "We don't want you just driving all over hell and gone." I didn't bothering telling him they were county roads and that I knew which one it was. I just let him fume a little. He has a deep mistrust and disrespect for the Forest Service. "Nothing but a bunch a goddamned environmentalists."

When I said, "How do you figure?" He said, "Don't tell me living in Missoula you ain't heard nothing about them raising grazing fees and doing pretty much everything they can to put a fella out of business."

I nodded that I had and grinned. I didn't mention CNN had shown me picketing Secretary of Interior Bruce Babbit's grazing hearings two years before in a red white and blue costume yelling, "Get the 'pork' off the range." I also never mentioned how embarrassed and humiliated I was for weeks after that hearing. I was conflicted.

He showed me how he had moved all his working pens and corrals up onto a hill further from the creek were they wouldn't be a problem for non-point-source pollution. "We're doing what we can. But I'll tell you what. I hold the last straw damn it. I got an ace in the hole and if they mean to put me out of business, I'll show them." When I asked him what he was talking about he said, "All I got to do is start selling off little 50 acre plots along that road you walked down here on. Nearly every day of the summer we get folks asking if we'd sell a nice site with a view. Yessiree. I'll show them bastards. Been building condos all my life and if they think they'll get me over a barrel they got another thing coming."

I didn't know which "they" he was talking about. The Forest Service? The Nature Conservancy, new comers, the bank? All of them? I wanted to ask who'd be the loser, Gilbert? Because it was clear to me he loved his place and his life more than any drive by tourist with dreams of a summer home. So who'd be showing who, Gilbert? Are you blaming the Forest Service for the regulations you know in your heart are better for the land? Are you blaming the environmentalists for the $45,000 loan you've got on your tractor. Are you blaming Fish and Wildlife Service for the $100,000 you've got in new pens? Second home yuppies for the recent dip in cattle prices?

I know that I was assuming a lot, but I got the distinct impression that the whole reason Gilbert had been able to afford to play ranch for the last four years is because his financial partner had yet to call in the chip which had been Gilbert's biggest selling point when he'd originally gotten them to be his partners which is that ranch land is at an all time high in Montana. Being a contractor in Couer D'alene Gilbert knows the real-estate business and he knows what kind of money the large financial institutions It was the second time in a half hour I'd wanted to cry for the guy.

He sent me out with his hired man, Mike, the pair of feet I'd met earlier under the tractor. He was big and quiet and athletic for a man in his forties and he was so serious it was a little disturbing. When we got in the beatup Jeep pickup and I accidentally called him John and apologized, he just said, "Hell, been called worse." He told me he is 46 years old, is a Vietnam vet and likes being a hired hand. He said he was from a working family and seemed to emphasize that his parents *run* a motel in Helena as opposed to owning it. We were talking about antelope hunting and he told a story about being really good at it. Shooting long range shots on the run killing ten and twelve at a time.

"I learned to shoot like that in the Service," he said, and before I could think of what to say he added. "In '69 they drafted me. I told 'em to go to hell, but then went anyway."

I didn't budge.

He said, "Did 36 months. Got real good at killing. Got so I could just about blow the head off anything and not feel nothing."

"For years I didn't feel much of anything..."

"But I got my boy now and that's helped a little."

It dawned on me that if he'd wanted to come unglued right then and there, he could have. But he was taking me to find my poles because I needed the help. And he seemed to be enjoying the brief break in his work day.

We found the road near my camping spot in about forty five minutes. It took me another thirty to hike up and get my tent poles. They were right where I'd left them. When I got back to the truck I found him with his feet propped up in the window of his truck. I whistled as I approached and pretended not to catch him dozing. As he sat up and stretched, he said, "Damn, you made pretty good time. I was hoping to get a longer nap."

"So much for tact," I thought.

As we drove back across the immense valley, I commented on how wild the valley was and at the incredible numbers of elk I had seen the previous day. I even mentioned the bear

tracks I had seen right above where we'd parked and that I thought they'd looked like griz tracks.

"Oh, you bet." He said. "You been hiking in griz country for the last few days. They're not as many up this end of the valley, but when you head over to the Lima Peaks tomorrow, that's sure as hell grizzly country." Said, "We like the country, we wouldn't live here if we didn't," and I believed him.

When I was sitting at my stove that night back up on the divide not a half a day behind my loose schedule writing my days activities into the journal, I commented on having met Gilbert Little and his hired hand Mike and I wondered to myself if their wasn't some sub conscious reason I'd left my poles the night before. Couldn't be.

> **6/24 Saturday, Day 13**
> I should say something about elk and how lovely they are in the Spring and early Summer after they've lost their thick, mottled winter coats and become these gleeming, chocolate-red and buckskin beauties. The yearlings and many of the younger cows in particular have a lovely color in early Summer. I love to just sit and watch them stand or lay quietly feeding and wait until one of them becomes alert to my presence. The standing ones will raise their heads to listen and sniff the air. The laying ones will rise rear-end first and then turn their heads as well. Mostly I like to watch them bound through the bush with heads held high in a camel-like trot, noses stuck out, grunting and sqeeking and chattering as they go. Indignant, yet with absolutely no interest to stay and study me. They want none of it.

From a high windy pass between Red Conglomerate Peaks and Garfield Mountain I could see way down to Interstate 15 as it climbs out of Lima, Montana, and up the slow grade to the town of Monida on the Continental Divide. It was a strangely exhilarating feeling to look down at tiny semi-trucks in the distance and recognize so much industry and commerce buzzing along just there in what would take me at least another day to cover on foot. Strange to think that those very trucks I was watching could be in Salt lake City within the next five or six hours. Funny enough, seeing the highway that far away made me lonely and I began to look forward to getting to Monida and maybe making a few phone calls.

The night before I'd had a pretty good scare that had slowed me down a bit and made me think twice about what I was doing. I walked a long way that day and had in the early evening gotten a little disoriented by the marginal Forest Service map I was using to navigate. A fork in the trail hadn't appeared where I thought it might and instead of dropping my pack and taking time to figure out where I was, I stormed up and down the steep sides of the drainage yelling at the top of my lungs, cursing the incompetence of the Forest Service.

"Fucking Freddies! Bastards couldn't find there ass with a sharp stick." I was literally so angry I almost had tears in my eyes. My jaw was clenched tight, so tight in fact I thought my teeth might shatter. I hadn't put my pack down thinking if I found the trail I wouldn't want to have to go back down and get it. So instead I was thrashing about the woods oblivious to how tired I was getting, just blind with rage.

"Fucking, lousy, wate- cooler-sitting, pape- pushing, excuse-making bureaucrats from HELL! Shave the country bald with clearcuts but can't come up with a simple fucking trail marker." And I was yelling this quite out in the open.

I picked up a stick and thrash it at a tree limb. My stick brokek and that sent me into a deeper rage. Even my pathetic attempts to decapitate a surrogate Forest Service employee were empty ineffective gestures of self-loathing. Then somehow in my rage, while pushing through thick creek-bottom trees a branch snapped back and whacked me in the face. It was a little startling because there wasn't anyone walking in front of me to snap it back. It made me stop and almost instantly I started to laugh out loud. I sat down and took off my pack and just laughed until I cried.

Here I was this raving lunatic walking around in the woods ranting at the trees, and then like Dorthy in the Wizard of OZ a tree just up and slaps me in the face as if to say, "Wake up. Who are you fooling?" It struck me as immensely humorous and the laughter and the tears were cathartic. I sat there for a couple of minutes and finally thought to drink some water. As I tilted my head back to drain my water bottle I saw there right in front of me down the creek a hundred yards was a big Douglas Fir with a white hatchet slash marking the trail. Perfect.

I decided to go ahead and hike the last five miles to the place where I was originally intending to stop that night. I figured that was payment for spending all that time and energy flailing about in the bushes for the last hour. But the decision to push the last five miles may have been a mistake because I soon grew exhausted and was walking along quite mindlessly. Twice I stumbled up on two big groups of elk, young bulls which made such a racket fleeing I was surprised how late I'd seen them. When I finally did find a place to camp I noticed as I stopped and dropped my pack that I was quite dizzy. And as I stooped to pull gear out of my bag I thought I might faint. And so I sat down and ate a handful of gorp and drank the last of my water.

I grew chilled and pulled on layers and it started to rain and snow a little. I began to worry I might have a hard time finding dry wood for my little stove so I stood to get camp set and found myself reeling and dizzy again. So on my hands and knees I pitched the tent taking it slowly. Close by I found a down log and snapped twigs off to cook with. When I got up to go to the creek I told myself I could breath deep and ride out the dizzy spell and that I'd be OK. But when I bent to dip my pot I almost toppled into the water and that scared me.

I made it back to my stove and I got the water boiling and I drank hot Gatorade and I made polenta and dried veggie stew. And I poked it down not bothering to chew. The whole time cooking I'd get dizzy whenever I moved. Better to lie still.

I don't think I would have been too worried had this never happened to me before but it had. About six years earlier when I was living in Los Angeles, California I'd had a bout with fainting spells. I passed out in the men's room at a real-estate conference I was attending and then again in the hotel lobby. After some time sitting still and trying to get a hold of myself, it kept happening and I had a friend take me to the hospital. The Emergency room doctors told me I needed food and pop because I was just experiencing low blood sugar. They gave me a 7-up and a sandwich but a half an hour later I was no better, still fainting any time I sat upright. They grew worried and committed me for the night and plugged me into an insulin I-V for six hours. In the morning I was quite all right, but a little baffled because the doctors couldn't

really explain it. They said, "Sometimes this happens. You're a big guy, you got stressed at work, you hadn't eaten, you had a few beers, you seem fine now, don't worry." So I didn't.

At least not until that night camped below the Continental Divide in the snowing rain, two days walk from a phone with no one expecting to hear from me for another six or seven days. I almost started to panic a little because I didn't want to die. But then I realized that was silly and that I was doing everything right. I realized that I was just dehydrated and a little maxed out and that I had gotten hot drinks and food in me and I was lying still so there was no need to freak out. That would only make things worse. Still it was all a little bit scary.

The next day I felt fine though the weather was cold and snowy. As I ate my cold granola and powdered milk I found myself dreaming of eggs over easy and hash browns. It was a dream I'd had for two or three days. In fact I walked the eight or so miles down out of the hills and across the interstate thinking I'd get some in Monida. I was certainly disappointed to discover that Monida, Montana, is a ghost town. I know that I had driven by Monida at least a dozen times on the highway, but, for some reason, I thought there was at least a gas station and or a truck stop cafe there. As I approached the town, I grew increasingly skeptical that anything would pan out. There were some dilapidated houses and two run down garages I could see from two miles out, but no sign of people.

When I actually got to town nothing had improved. No general store and no cafe for passing motorists. There was only a sad little pay phone mounted on a telephone pole at what was once the only intersection of that windblown ghost town at 6870 feet. I decided that while I could I would call friends back in Missoula and make a status report and check to see if anyone had committed to walking through Yellowstone with me yet.

I left a message on my girlfriend Sarah's phone, and then talked with Tom, my friend who'd started the trip with me. He was excited to hear from me, but when I told him of the weather, he was not sorry he wasn't there. I also talked to Jiri, another Missoula friend. He'd talked to my brother Duke and was planning on walking through Yellowstone with me. This

was a relief to hear because I'd been nervous about being alone in Yellowstone, and I suspected Duke wasn't going to make it. I told Jiri I'd see him in a week and I hung up the phone.

I'd be a liar if I told you I didn't even once think about walking out onto the Interstate and hitching a ride back to Missoula. The urge to sleep in a bed with Sarah next to me was strong. I wanted to sleep in late and make love with my girlfriend and get up after noon and go to the movies while it rained. God I was tired of the cold drizzling rain.

I walked away from that phone and the wind was blowing. It was pretty clearly snowing 500 feet higher up on the Divide and I decided to not walk along the crest of the Centennial Mountains. There was clearly a good deal of snow up there and I was for the first time on the trip feeling physically tired, like I needed a long nap. So I set out on the dirt county road which leads into the Centennial Valley and ultimately up to the Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge and Red Rock Pass. A brown UPS van blew past, not going my way at all.

The Centennial Valley

The Centennial Valley is one of the places that typifies Montana for me, one of those places where it is easy to understand why it is called Big Sky Country. The Centennial Valley is about fifty or sixty miles long East to west and about ten to fifteen miles wide north to south, depending on where you measure across. To the south it is bounded by the steep north face of the Centennial Mountains which drop in the space of a mile from their high alpine crest at 10,000 feet to the broad stretch of grass at around 6000 feet. Rising 4000 feet shear out of the valley. To the north two mountain ranges are visible both the Snowcrests and the Gravelies, as well as the high country around Red Rock Pass at the east end of the valley. That end of the valley is dominated by two large bodies of water, lower and upper Red Rock Lakes. It is one of those places where the imagination can see how Montana was once like Alaska. Undeveloped and wild.

The weather had been bad when I dropped into the valley and in a moment of boredom or exhaustion or insecurity I agreed to take a ride up the road from two guys in a Toyota Land cruiser who not two hours before had passed me going the other direction. They carried me for twelve miles as I was telling them about my trip. I kept staring out the window watching the two big cattle ranches we passed and I wondered why in the hell I took that ride. They dropped me at the little town of Lakeview, Montana. Lakeview is the headquarters of the Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge and consists of a few, low, wood-frame houses, two or three barns and some horse pens. I scrounged dinner that night from leftovers in a dude ranch kitchen; Indian Tacos and a bowl of rice crispies. I threw my bag out behind an abandoned horse barn and fell asleep before I could get around to making a journal entry.

The next morning I walked into the Red Rock Lake National Wildlife Refuge headquarters and asked for Danny Gomez the refuge director. I told Danny we knew each other from when I' had worked for the Wilderness Society and we'd organized a bird watching weekend there years before. Danny lied and said he remembered me (we'd actually never met) and asked what he could do for me. I told him that I had walked there from Missoula and was heading to Denver but that I was taking a day off and was interested in seeing more of the refuge, but had no car or boat. I wondered if there weren't some biologists or refuge managers who were going in the field that day with whom I might tag along.

He said, "Do you see that house over there?" pointing to a house across the road. He said, "Go introduce yourself to that house. It's full of graduate students studying fish, birds and plants. You walk in there and tell them what you're up to and tell them I said you could tag along with any of them you find of interest." And he wished me good luck and then ducked back into his office to take a phone call.

So I went over to the row of little ranch style houses and introduced myself to a young guy just walking out to his blue Ford Bronco with Government issue plates. His name was Kevin Downs and he told me he was studying snipe. I laughed at the notion of going on a snipe hunt but didn't hesitate when he told me to hop in.

Snipe are a little brown shore bird people often mistake for a sandpiper or a killdeer. They are the ones with the longish beaks and make the haunting whoo-whoo-whoo-whoo-whoop-whoop sound you hear near mountain hay meadows in June. I'd been hearing them my whole trip but had never seen one.

As we drove down to the east end of the Upper Red Rock Lake, Kevin told me we were looking at a common snipe and yes they do exist, and yes people do hunt them. Lord knows why. It could be that the make challenging shots. We drove to what he called the willow bog. We proceeded to walk into the willows, and I noted that the mosquitoes were not bad considering we were up to our ankles in water. We almost instantly flushed a duck, a mallard hen, and then with a certain non-chalance as if walking with a stranger in the mud was no big deal, he

pointed down under a small willow and said, "See her nest?" Four large brown eggs. Wow! He just looked under a bush and there they were.

Kevin was carrying the receiving end of a radio transmitting device, the kind you see on National Geographic specials. It had a four-way t-shaped antenna attached to a blue box with knobs that hung around his neck. Walking around out there I felt like Marlin Perkins of Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom. Kevin had marked four or five male snipe territorial ranges with orange surveyors tape tied to willow branches in a curious square grid pattern. He told me we were tracking the one female he still had a beacon on as he turned on his machine. It started to beep. He pointed to another orange marker outside the grid and said, "That's her nest." He took five long strides toward the orange tape and the beeps got stronger. He turned down the machine and within two more steps she flushed. We watched her back down making mental note of her location then he bent and pulled back the branches of a low willow and showed me another nest. This time there were only three eggs which were smaller than the duck's and mottled or speckled dark brown.

After a few hours sloshing around the willow bog we got back in the Bronco and headed for headquarters. He told me he was working through the University of Wyoming and that snipe are an indicator species for wetlands. They exist in almost every type of wetland habitat in North America but biologists had noticed a significant dip in their numbers. His study was only in the first of three seasons, but he hoped to prove that Snipe are wetland dependent (something I thought was obvious) but no one can figure out why their numbers are lagging.

As we headed back in Kevin slowed down and waved an oncoming truck down to talk. It turned out the driver of the other rig was Jim Modgen, a fisheries biologist. He was going out to do a fish count in his trap at the mouth of Red Rock Creek, and Kevin asked him to take me along. Jim turned out to be the most enthusiastic fisherman I have ever met. He holds the state record for Bull Trout and Grayling, though he was quick to point out that trap-catches count in the record books and most records are held by biologists like himself whose job it is to monitor fish.

"It's kind of cheating," he said with a grin.

In the case of Red Rock lakes he was monitoring Arctic grayling and we drove to the trap he had set up across the mouth of Red Rock Creek. He explained that the two lakes have the only population of lake-dwelling Arctic Grayling left in the lower 48 states. This is significant because after his count from the previous summer there were only 240 grayling left and so far this year he'd only caught ten.

He told me that Trout Unlimited and the Montana State University authorities were in no hurry to publish the study because the findings were not good and none of them wanted to face the ugly political mess it would surely spawn.

I asked him what he thought the problem was.

He said without hesitating "It's the fucking cows."

"The cows?" I asked.

He said, "You saw them driving over here. They're killing the lake. That and all the logging on the National Forest."

He went on to show me his high tech watch. On it is a altimeter and a depth finder. He and a friend spent a month the summer before with that watch tied to the end of fishing line and a pole running a grid pattern over the lakes and discovered that nowhere is it more than five feet deep in water, below that is a ten foot deep layer of muck. He said that early settlers records from the turn of the century put the depth between 25 and thirty feet deep. The enormous amount of grazing that occurs there three to four months of the year, especially above the lake on Alaska and Red Rock creeks has choked the lake. So winters are especially hard when three feet of ice freezes at the surface. Native Ling and other predatory fish make life hell on grayling and trout.

He said, "You cut the bellies open on the Ling and you find grayling and trout. That's where the grayling are going, the bellies of the Ling." The intense grazing and heavy logging practices over the last century have accelerated erosion patterns and subsequently choked down the lakes.

His trap was a series of cables strung across the stream anchored by metal fence posts pounded into the banks. Strung to the cables were a line of thin PVC pipes which hung side to side like a picket fence submerged in the creek. The pipes let fish swimming down stream through like a swinging door. Fish swimming upstream are funneled into a large cage with a lid on it anchored on the south side of the trap. Wearing a pair of tattered neoprene chest waders that looked like he never took them off, Jim first wadded out into the stream with a pitch fork and cleared any sticks and other junk that may have accumulated on the pipes. Then he told me to stand on the big wire cage and open the lid and look in. It was cloudy, but I could see the cobbles on the bottom of the stream.

"See anything?"

"Nope."

"I didn't think so."

He explained that the reason he was trapping fish swimming upstream is to count how many spawn. The trap was set to catch the summer grayling run. And other than the occasional brown trout he'd only caught ten so far this year.

"It's too damn bad, too, because the run is all but over. We caught 250 by this time last year. Yeah, shit. They're all but extinct. And the University still won't let me publish my findings."

As we drove back to headquarters where he dropped me by the barn where I'd stashed my gear, I told him about my trip. He asked if I was going to walk through Yellowstone and if so was I planning on hiking the Two Ocean Plateau, a region on the south side of the park. I told him that I was and his face lit up like a small child's.

"Oh, no shit!" he said. "You've got to check out Two Ocean creek." I said I'd heard about the creek that runs down the Continental Divide and then splits, half running to the Atlantic, the other half to the Pacific. He said, That's where they think the yellowstone cuts got into the Snake River run." He was speaking of yellowstone cutthroat trout which were unique to only those two drainages. It obviously struck Jim that the possibility of a fish

swimming all the way up a stream and then crossing the Continental Divide into an entirely different drainage was nothing short of a miracle. And indeed it is. I took a small amount of pride that news of my trip could inspire such enthusiasm for him.

I spent that afternoon walking to the campground that sits five miles west of the Refuge headquarters. When I got to the campground I was sitting with my pack against a post holding up an interpretive sign about trumpeter swans or something of the sort. The campground has a good view of the lakes. The wildlife refuge among other things is one of the few remaining nesting sites for the endangered trumpeter swans who once graced much of the continent. The swans were the reason the Federal government set the two large lakes and much of the wetlands surrounding them aside. Cattle had badly depleted much of the best nesting habitat.

A van of people pulled into the campground and six dispersed out of it trailing off to the tents and other cars parked about the grounds. I surmised that these folks had been here the night before and were just now returning from a day hike. One of them spotted me sitting there tired and unmoving and wondered aloud if I was all right. I think she asked more out of concern for the grubby looking drifter watching them prepare camp than out of any curiosity as to who I was.

"Where are you coming from?" she asked politely.

"Today, or in general?" I replied.

"Well, why not both?" She said and smiled, no longer as concerned about the weirdo sitting on his pack.

"Well, today I just walked here from the Lakeview Headquarters. But I spent the last fifteen days walking here from Missoula, Montana."

They were excited by my story, and so they decided to invite me to dinner. They explained that they were part of a church in West Yellowstone, "Our Lady of the Pines," whose pastor was very much interested in nature and issues of spirituality. They said they come out many times a year as a group to not only admire and bask in the out of doors but to

ponder the examples nature offers in a way towards right living. We had a long animated discussion about the ecological state of the world. And while we all agreed and recognized the need to change our personal lives, they told me they were looking for institutional change.

They had with them a curious energetic little man named Dan Henning who I knew of from the University of Montana. He is a philosopher of sorts who has done a lot of thinking and writing on Deep Ecology and Buddhism and other eastern religions. He had them reading a book called The Promise Of Nature; Ecology and Cosmic Purpose written by John F. Haught. They gave me a copy. The book is a decent discourse of how first big religion failed mankind, and now big science has failed mankind, and that if we could only come up with a "best of both worlds view," we'd probably be better off.

Dinner consisted of beans and franks, warmed over cous cous, and some cold red wine served out of a mylar sack that once lined a Ernest and Julio box. I brought my cup and plate over and was glad for the change of fare. They made sure I had plenty to eat and made a big show of not letting me refuse more wine. They all ate off paper plates and were drinking out of plastic disposable cups. I said nothing.

The day I left the Centennial Valley was the first really bad day of mosquitoes. It was as if they all decided to hatch at noon on July 2nd and swarm the dumb guy wearing shorts walking there on the road. The quiet intimidating hum of their countless numbers droning in the meadows is enough to wear you out, so I decided better to just keep walking than to suffer a break. It was long, hot, hard work walking the county road up out of the valley, and I found myself dipping into a black funk, my caustic energies focused on the congenial Christians I'd met the night before. I started talking to myself.

"Why didn't you jump all over those well intended, pathetic Christians and all their environmental hand-wringing? Why didn't you ask them how in the name of God they could eat off paper plates and drink from throwaway cups? Are they waiting for the second coming of Christ to take responsibility of their lives, to change, to make a difference?" I should have been asking myself the same question. How am I any different? I had seen the mound of

cardboard and plastic I'd assembled in my making ready for my trip. Throughout the preparation of the trip I'd daydreamed about being able to do the whole walk un-aided. That I could carry a fly rod and a slingshot and a bag of rice and hunt and gather my way to Colorado. But everything changed once I decided I had to be in Denver by a certain time. Once I had an agenda and a schedule the ability to take the time necessary to work my way to Colorado was lost. So trout and grouse became a novelty. I didn't have time to catch my own food, or at least that is what I told myself. And that is how I rationalized my way into taking containers of peanut butter and honey, cans of sardines, bags of noodles and rice and freeze-dried beans. And it is this same process of rationalization in which a church group from West Yellowstone takes paper plates and cups and beans and weenies on their sem- annual overnight car-camping retreat. No, I was no different than they.

6/1/95 Saturday, Day 20
Woke up this morning thinking about school. Graland Country Day.
Three hundred of us started every day there with a ritual worship of our fathers and the important work they did. It went::

Our Father
who art in heaven
hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come,
thy will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.

"On earth as it is in heaven." That's a lot for a kid to interpret at eight o'clock in the morning and so I suspect that it was done then so we wouldn't try to interpret it at all, better to just drive it home through repetition. We never once discussed this prayer or what it meant. "Thine is the Kingdom, the Power and the Glory." Silly me. I guess it was pretty clear.

Two guys driving a blue Toyota wagon handed me a cold can of beer as they passed and yelled encouragement into the dust they kicked up. I drank that beer in about three gulps and it tasted good. The quick fleeting buzz of that tired, thirsty beer carried me to the top of Red Rock pass.

There I met three haggard-looking middle-aged men in a small red Nissan with Missouri plates. They were standing there in khaki pants, nylon windbreakers and deck shoes taking pictures of the Continental Divide sign like three lost weekend sailors. Random tourists, I assumed. One of them asked if I'd take a picture of the three of them together. The smallest of the three elaborated as to how it was especially important that they get a picture of them on the longest tributary of the Missouri.

"Oh?" I asked. I had dropped my pack and was kind of pacing around, making the mosquitoes work.

"Red Rock Creek is the longest tributary of the Missouri and therefore the longest river in the country," the man added. "We've come a long way for this."

"Well, I hate to tell you, but Red Rock creek is not the longest tributary of the Missouri." I said swatting my calf. "It's actually Hell Roaring Creek, there on the other side of Sawtelle Peak." I gestured to the high peak south of where we all stood. "Here, take a look at my map..... Damn bugs are bad, huh?"

As we looked at my maps, they told me about their travels. It turned out they were taking a boat from Columbia, Missouri, to Astoria, Oregon. "Kind of like Lewis and Clark," only in a motor boat. They'd been at it a month. The small man took a look at my T-shirt and asked what the Environmental Writing institute was. I told them it is a writing workshop held each spring in the Bitterroot valley. "This year it was lead by a guy named Wendell Berry. You ever heard of him?"

The youngest and friendliest man stepped in with a quick laugh. "Oh sure. Bill here is a writer."

"Oh yeah?" I said "What's your name?"

The smaller man with the camera said, "Well it's Bill Trodgen, but I go by the pen name of William Least Heat Moon."

"No shit?" I said enthusiastically. "Man! I read Blue Highways. My History Professor at Lewis and Clark College had us read it. He loved the part where you totally slam

the bored and mindless students you met at our school. He had us read that part to challenge us, put a little ginger up our asses. Man, he's going to flip when he hears I met you up here."

I caught myself being enthusiastic and recognized the heady effects of the beer I'd chugged down. I started packing up my maps. The friendly man said, "It looks like you've been out a while. Where have you been?"

So I told them all about my trip. I told them where I'd been and my plans for the rest of the way. We looked out across the Henry's Fork of the Snake River toward the Yellowstone Plateau, and I pointed to where some twenty miles' distant you could see the vast clearcuts in the lodgepole stands on the Targhee National Forest. I told them how NASA astronauts could see those clearcuts from the space shuttle. I told them about the work I'd done there the summer before proving that the Forest Service had lied about the number of logging roads they keep open.

"They cut all along the west boundary of the park. It's grizzly habitat and there are so many roads there now the grizzly stay away."

We turned and looked back west, the large glacial lakes of the Red Rock Lake Wildlife Refuge were just catching late afternoon sun. I told them about Kevin Downs and Jim Mogin the two biologists I'd met and my day in the field looking at snipe and grayling. Leastheat Moon took notes and seemed like he was going to call them. We wished each other luck. I shouldered my pack and turned up the hill. I hadn't made ten paces when I heard one of them yell, "Hey Woody! Can we take your picture?"

"Well, sure, I guess. "

I told them how to spell my name and then added that if they tried to get away with saying they went to the longest tributary on the Missouri, I'd call their publisher.

The next day I got up late, it was raining and spent the day hiking down off of Red Rock divide to Reynolds Pass where U.S. Highway 287 joins Montana and Idaho. As I walked down out of the trees, mostly aspen and Douglas firs, I noticed a suvey line marked off in a quarter

mile long tangent off the road. It was a line of day-glo orange plastic tape all tied about chest high either in branches or around the trunks of trees.

I'd been coming to Montana since I was a kid, and I had watched the slow development of this area of Reynolds pass be marred by the construction of summer homes. It is very scenic where I was walking, not two miles from Henry's Lake, the headwaters of the Henry's Fork of the Snake river in Idaho. I was convinced that this obnoxious line of orange survey-tape marked a future road access to new home sites there on the shoulder of the National Forest. I imagined some clever real-estate hustler swapping the naive Forest Service District Ranger into a less than equitable trade, and I grew angry. So I bushwhacked down to the survey line and proceeded to pull each piece of tape off it's respective tree all the way to the point where the line diverted off the main road. I shoved the wads of tape into my pockets and hoped I wouldn't run into a Forest ranger before I could throw them away.

I don't know exactly where I picked up the habit of tearing down survey tape I see when I'm hiking, but it is something I do on a fairly regular basis. I don't really think much about it. Just if I see orange or blue tape, some kind of marker, survey stake, or mining-claim canister I will tear it up or knock it down or crush it, always careful to be sure whoever put it there will not find it again. Most often I just stuff the plastic ribbon in my pocket and move on to the next one. I am never fully comfortable with myself when I do it. I mostly find myself wondering what my father would think of such behavior. He has laid down no small amount of surveyor's tape in his day, for roads, parking lots, buildings, housing developments and ski areas. I think he enjoys the simple logic and order of such work. But when I tear out a survey marker I always imagine him arriving the next morning and being exasperated at the childish assholes who'd made a disrespectful mess of his living.

About a mile down the road I walked up on a couple packing gear into the back of a small blue pickup truck. We said hello, and I stopped to drink some water and chat. They were young, in their early twenties and told me they were there working on a biological survey for the Forest Service. They were looking for neotropical songbirds and had just finished laying out

four miles of their study. OOPS! I started laughing and made sure they were curiously laughing along with me before I shyly told them I'd just ripped out a quarter mile of their survey grid.

"Damn. I'm sorry. I thought it was marking a logging road or a fucking subdivision."

They kind of laughed and looked at each other. "Are you sure? Where were you walking?" I started to explain the location a mile or so back, and then I pulled one of the fifty or so pieces of tape from my pocket and handed it to the guy. He took one quick look at the markings on the tape and shook his head.

"Shit." He looked at his partner and she looked at me and then we all started laughing again. Depending who you are talking to, their age and where they are from, there is this unwritten code among hikers and outdoor enthusiasts in the west that no matter where you are, if and when you see survey tape you are to rip it up. It is part of a politically correct or hip subculture that came out of the seventies public lands environmental movement. Inspired by Edward Abbey books, Hayduke and Seldom Seen Smith, I'd grown up pulling survey markers whenever I went hiking. It was just what you did. Like smoking pot in high school and wearing Patagonia.

"I'm really sorry, you guys.

They looked at me and said they understood. I was relieved they were so friendly about it. The woman smiled and said she'd probably have done the same, but that she'd have read the tape to find out what it was first. I decided she would have never done the same because the last thing you do is read the tape. You're not interested in the facts. What you are acting on is pure, gut anger. What someone has written on the tape is unimportant. You never delude yourself into thinking such action will make a difference. Someone will only come back out and redo it. The point is you are fucking something up. Blind retribution, no matter whose day you ruin.

6/3/95, Monday, Day 22
Home, home on the range.
Where the rich and the affluent play.

Where the fence is deluxe
And the view costs big bucks
And the Fax-line can reach you all day.

I walked another hour after leaving the biologists and came out on the highway by a large sign marking the Continental Divide and the Montana/Idaho border. It was late afternoon, and I had about ten miles to go to get to the trailhead on XX creek at the foot of an area known as the Lionshead, a southern extension of the Madison Range separated from the rest of the mountains by the Madison River. Ten miles was a long way to go in the little time I had left in the day. The land between where I was and the trailhead was private and I could save myself almost a full five miles by walking straight across the private sections instead of along the highway. There were a number of houses along the way but it seemed that if I stayed on the small grid of dirt roads that linked them together I may wind up with only two or three miles of walking in the open.

The western flank of the Madison range juts up very abruptly from valley floor, a rugged contrast to the broad sloping open fields of grass. When I first came to Montana years ago, there was no subdivision in this place. It was wide open grass country dotted only with cows. But since the fishing craze of the late eighties and the popularity of Montana in Hollywood, numerous homes had been built along the Madison River. Why anyone would want to build a house out in the middle of those fields is beyond me. Many of them simplistic structures built on speculation. Ugly little pop-up homes with no water, no trees, no creeks, no shade. Nothing but the view and the wind. A tired old story.

After crossing two fences I walked two or three miles before I started down what appeared to be a county maintained subdivision road. I passed two large log homes that didn't look as if they'd been recently occupied. And as I took a right hand turn, I had about a mile or so to walk to the end of the road where I would cross the fence. There was another large log home on the hill above me and at the driveway entrance a wooden archway with a western letters which read, "Grizzly Mountain Ranch."

All of a sudden a jacked-up yellow Toyota pickup truck came rushing down the dirt driveway splashing charismaticly through the puddles along the way. The truck turned right and headed toward me, coming to a sliding stop in the gravel in front of me filling the road. A short man in high heeled cowboy boots, pressed Wrangler jeans, pink and blue striped western shirt and large felt cowboy hat stepped out and said, "Where do you think you're going?" Not, "Howdy." Not, "Afternoon," not, "Can I help you?" Just, "Where do you think you're going?"

Trying to turn on the charm, I lied and said, "Well, I was just about to walk up your driveway and ask whose place it is up there on the other side of that fence. I was hoping to cut across to the XX trailhead."

I thought for a second that I'd stumped him because he sat there for a while not saying anything; just looking me up and down and checking out my gear. I noticed there was a 30-six in the gun rack in the rear window of his truck (knowing that hunting season wasn't for another two months).

Finally, the fellow kind of mumbled from out beneath the huge mustache that covered his mouth like a child's hand "Ah, naw, no, no no, nope, no. Ah, no, no you can't go out this way. This here is private property." As if saying such was all the explanation needed. And then he didn't say anything else.

"Oh really?" I said. "Darn. I been hiking the Divide for the last month. I'm supposed to meet some people at the trailhead an hour ago and thought I could save some time. I won't bother anything, and I won't leave any gates open."

"Nope. No way. Hell, I got horses and livestock between here and there. Your loud colored gear will spook them." He was angry. "Where you going anyway? You can't walk to West Yellowstone from here. Did you know there's grizzly bears up there? You packing a gun?"

"No sir, I'm not packing a gun. Yes, I know there's grizzlies out here but I'm not worried about it. Mostly I'm hoping I don't miss my friends at the trailhead, and you'd only be doing me a favor to let me make a short cut across your place."

He was visibly angry. "People drive up here all the time wondering how to get to the trailhead and it drives me crazy. I'm tired of it. No, you'll have to go back down to the road and walk in the county road just like everyone else." This last point stung because he knew he had me, and he got no small amount of pleasure telling me it.

I said, "Well, thanks for nothing," and I turned and walked away. Instead of going back to the highway though, I turned right on the next driveway and hoped the next house down would be more friendly. When I got there a woman very tentatively walked out and stood back twenty feet from the fence and waited as I approached. A man who I assumed was her husband stood on the roof watching with his hands on his hips where minutes ago he'd been swinging a hammer. She kind of yelled at me as I approached hoping her voice would carry. "This here is private property. Our neighbor called and warned us you were coming. He thinks it would be best if you just went back to the highway and waked that way."

"Oh, I won't hurt anything. I'm just trying to save some ...."

The husband yelled down "You'll be moving on now!"

"Yeah, I will."

I was furious. I couldn't believe these people. Here they were living in a glorified subdivision imagining themselves great ranchers. Images of Ben Cartwright and the Ponderosa flashing through their guppy brains. The very same people who vote for Dan Quayle, listen to Rush Limbaugh, and vacation in Branson, Missouri. A small- minded simplistic people who think nothing of building a stick house out in the wind. I'd been walking across some of the biggest oldest ranches in all Montana for the last month and all were more than happy to let me walk across their places. Real ranches. Not some 40 acre ranchette with a retard in a Tonka truck guarding the gate.

I was talking to myself again.

"This here's private property which entitles me to behave like a dysfunctional moron."

"You afraid of bears boy?"

"Yeah, I'm afraid of bears. But mostly I am terrified of what I might do to an asshole like you."

I walked slowly back out to highway feeling physically beaten. I walked along with my thumb out as the occasional Winnabago whizzed by. Most of the cars had rental plates from Salt Lake and Twin Falls. After about a half an hour a small blue Toyota pickup pulled off the road in front of me. It was the bird biologists.

The woman stepped out of the truck and said, "What happened to you?"

I smiled and said I'd gambled on a short-cut and now was paying double for the mistake. She wasn't sure she understood but told me they'd give me a ride to the trailhead if I wanted. I thanked her and piled me and my pack into the back of their tiny truck. As I could feel them slow down to turn into the Forest Service access road, I reached behind me and knocked on the little glass window behind the cab. The woman slid the window open. I could just see the man in his rearview mirror.

"Say, you don't suppose you could drop me instead at the Silver Dollar Bar in Ennis?" I asked. They looked at each other to be sure they heard me right. "It's the 4th of July weekend. I'll just be hitching a ride there in a day or two anyway."

"Sure....," they said hesitantly. "No problem." I'd just blown the romantic sheen off their image of my trip. As I rode backwards down the highway along the Madison River I wondered if I hadn't blown it off mine as well. There was nothing in Ennis, Montana, that I hadn't seen before and that couldn't wait until I'd made it all the way to West Yellowstone. I'd just committed to stopping a day early, and I wasn't sure why.

I thought of the little man in the yellow pick-up dressed up like a cowboy on Halloween and I felt sorry for him. I felt bad because maybe he acts the way he does because he knows people hate him for building his house in the middle of the scenery. Maybe he just has his back up because deep in his heart he knows his version of the American dream contaminates his neighbor's. Anyway, the light on the river was hypnotic, and I was too tired to stay mad at him. So I put my head down on my pack and let the quiet whine of the highway

to stay mad at him. So I put my head down on my pack and let the quiet whine of the highway lull me to sleep.

Yellowstone

I walked through Yellowstone National Park with an expatriated Czechoslovakian dissident named Jiri Doscocil. A picture of understated physical strength, Jiri is the only person I know who can gracefully go from months sitting at an office computer to slogging long eighteen mile days with a 75 pound pack, and all without muttering a single complaint. Well, at least no complaints about his own physical condition or comfort. He is a marvel of mental and physical toughness with a thick frame and square jaw subtlety disguised by his shaggy blonde hair and easy smile.

I first met Jiri four years earlier at a meeting of forest activists on the second floor of the Union Hall in Missoula, Montana. Jiri is a computer Graphic Information System (GIS) mapping whiz of sorts, and he and another man had recently proven that the U.S.. Forest Service systematically lies about the number of trees they have available to harvest. The Forest Service is required by law to cut trees at a sustainable rate; that is, they have to have as many trees growing as they are harvesting, assuring a timber resource for future generations. Jiri's computer model of a severely clearcut portion of the Kootenai National Forest showed that the Forest Service was calling large clearcuts planted with seedlings "mature timber". The reason they did this was so they could continue cutting what little mature timber was still there. Jiri's computer evidence was hard proof for what forest activists had long suspected and complained about; the forests were being cut at an unsustainable rate.

However, Jiri's work had become very unpopular. He was getting pressure from the University of Montana Forestry School to tone his work down and more and more they were

keeping him from accessing the school's computer, the one he'd used to do all his work. The Forestry School is in the business of teaching forest management for industry and they were not interested in the hard truths an angry Czech has to say about their questionable scientific methods.

When we met I was working in Bozeman, Montana, for a large national environmental organization called The Wilderness Society. I focused my efforts on grizzly bear recovery and worked with people like Jiri to somehow slow the destruction of what little grizzly habitat remains in the lower 48 states. Jiri's frustration with the Forestry school was not dissimilar to my frustration with the Wilderness Society. Something about it's large size and corporate structure made them less inclined to do everything in their power to make life miserable for the Forest Service. A tactic I was a big advocate of at the time. Within the year I had left The Wilderness Society and moved to Missoula to attend graduate school.

So it is with certain irony and humor that Jiri and I set out due south from the parking lot at the Grizzly Discovery Center in West Yellowstone to walk for a day and a half down the long ugly clearcut that defines the western border of the nation's favorite National Park. We started in the thin stands of lodgepole on what is known as the West Boundary Trail between the park's entry gate and the historic tourist town. The trail starts right along the back of the chain-link fence that is the Grizzly Discovery Center.

The Discovery Center is a highly controversial zoo and IMAX movie theater that was ushered in the year before to glean yet more money from the numerous Winnebago driving tourists that might not otherwise know what to do with their time in Yellowstone. In it are Curly, Toby, Jasper, and five or so other grizzly bears that the less than subtle developer of this theme-park argues not only constitute a good educational opportunity for visitors but would otherwise be destroyed if left in the wild. They are bears from Alaska and British Columbia that have become habitualized to human foods and thus dubbed "problem bears" and so they are neutered and de-clawed and sent to West Yellowstone to serve out the rest of their lives.

While the developers and other promoters are probably right about the bear's slim futures, their rhetoric strikes a thin veil for the money which really motivate them.

The newest thing in zoo rationalization, besides arguing that zoos are necessary for maintaining species (an insidious argument proffered by those unwilling to address the hard questions of stopping destructive human behavior and protecting what little habitat is left), is that zoos can be improved to make the animal's experience more real. So they put raisins in a hollowed out bowling ball and chocolate covered ants under a fake log. These items occupy the first hour of a bear's day and so reduce the amount of sorry, dejected pacing that bears develop in less friendly confines.

Jiri and I walked behind the cage not twenty feet from a massive chocolate brown grizzly which stood up on its hind legs and made short work of a twenty foot lodgepole pine tree standing in its pen. The tree snapped off at its base like a dry twig. It was an awesome demonstration of raw power and we kind of looked at each other with nervous grins. The bear in the pen was an amazingly effective reminder that we were heading off into grizzly country again.

As Jiri and I marveled at the awesome strength of this sadly caged bear, a security guard with a 44 pistol on his hip came up to us from the other side of the fence and said, "You'll have to move it along."

Jiri, always wary of authority said, "We're doing nothing wrong. This is a marked system trail in the park."

"Well we've had calls of threats from people who want to cut the fence on this place so we can't be too careful," the guard said, which was amusing to us because we hadn't made those calls ourselves but secretly wished we had, and probably knew who did.

"Oh, OK," we said. "We thought you were just sore that we didn't pay a fee." I asked him if he'd seen the bear break that tree in half and he laughed and said, "Oh yeah. He does it every day right around 9:00."

As we walked away down the trail Jiri said in his curling Czech accent, "Those fuckers!"

And so I laughed to myself as I walked ahead of him on the broad flat remnants of a clearcut. Not only was I going to have to come to terms with my own anger and frustration, but I was going to have to put up with Jiri's too.

Not two miles out of West Yellowstone the flat terrain tips up and rises about a thousand feet in a deceiving lift which is the characteristic rim of Yellowstone Plateau. The going got tough as the trail disappeared, and it became clear we were looking at a couple of days bushwhacking through down timber. Between the slash left behind in clearcuts and the tangled snarl created by the fires of '88 and '90 the going was grubby and slow. When we stopped to rest, we inevitably got covered in soot no matter how hard we tried to avoid it. And the bugs were bad, so I settled into a steady walking pace and thought about other times I'd been in this country.

The most recent time had been the summer before. I'd ridden my mountain bike not two miles as a crow flies from where we were walking. A friend and I had spent two weeks riding the endless network of logging roads on the Targhee National Forest trying to prove that the Freddies were cheating on their Open Road Density standards for grizzly bears. Bears and roads don't mix well. It's a matter of men in trucks with guns. The mere thought of the Forest Service and their ability to produce senseless policy and arcane jargon put me in an instant black humor. That forest activists had to enlist the use of satellite imagery and digitized computer graphics to disprove a formula concocted to rationalize something as insidious as a minimum viable population was enough to send me into fits of rage. It was my opinion that any idiot in a Winnebago should be able to see the impact the clearcuts have on the region, and all the best science in the world was just so much mental-masturbation. I caught myself and made a conscious effort to change the subject.

Yes, I was pleased to be back in the park. My first visit to Yellowstone was in winter when I was about eleven years old. I was traveling with my parents who'd decided to make a

vacation out of a business trip. My Dad had been asked by some prospective resort developers to look at a site for a ski area just west of the park near Hebgen Lake. While my dad spent the day on a snow-cat deciding that the location was poor and a major earthquake fault was not a good place to put a small city, my mother and I decided to rent a snowmobile and sled into the park.

One must see West Yellowstone in the winter to appreciate the attraction a snowmobile provides a young boy. It was like the set of a John Ford western movie, only the horses had been replaced by snowmobiles. Men, women, and children clad in one-piece insulated coverall suits with green and orange stripes down the sides hung about the town like so much blue smoke. And they all were riding snowmobiles. So my mom in her unflappable good-nature suggested we'd spend the day sledding out to see Old Faithful. It would be about 50 miles round-trip.

It was a very pretty day. The sun was out but it was extremely cold, enough to make your nostrils stick together when you breathe. We had spectacular riding through massive vertical clouds of steam and mist, which we discovered were coming from hot pots and springs. The light off these great white billows was quite lovely and made for a nice setting. But neither of us liked the riding very much. As she tells the story, we hadn't proceeded more than a half an hour up the flat groomed trail along the Madison River when I tapped her on the shoulder and asked her if she was having fun.

She yelled, "What!"

I yelled again, "Are you having any fun?"

She looked at me and cracked a smile and yelled, "Not so much!"

And then I yelled, "Kind of noisy isn't it."

So just shy of Madison Junction we turned the machine off and were briefly stunned by the immense but welcome silence. We watched two large trumpeter swans duck in and out of the steam where warm water seeped into the black river. And when a long wagon-train of about thirteen machines with tow trailers and walkie-talkies pulled up, we decided to turn back for town, settling on the prospects of hot cocoa and cheese burgers.

Just then a mosquito stirred me from my reverie and I turned to check on the Czech. Jiri was quite a ways back. I felt badly because I hadn't been paying attention and was just grinding along at my own pace. I'd forgotten that I'd been at this for almost a month and was probably in better shape. So I sat and braved the bugs and waited for him to catch up. Jiri was indeed tired but he was not sore at me. He'd done a fair amount of backcountry travel and was familiar with the vagaries of individual pace. He didn't take it personally and unlike some people doesn't treat hiking like a contest or competition. There were plenty of times I could remember struggling along miserable as he broke a ski track barely in a sweat a hundred yards up ahead of me.

"How's it going?" I asked as he approached the log I was sitting on. He waited to answer till he got his pack off.

"Not bad," he said sipping water, "for a fucking clearcut."

I laughed and took a swig of his water as he looked back down across the lodgepole at West Yellowstone now five or six miles in the distance.

"Nice to be out of *there* though" I said, and even as it came out of my mouth I was aware of the disdainful tone in my voice - so much disrespect for the glitzy tourist town. I hadn't forgotten the pesto pizza and imported beers from the night before. I hadn't forgotten the ice-cream sandwiches or the bookstore that doubles as a coffee shop, or the phone calls to family and friends. But I wanted to forget them. I wanted no ownership in the destruction. Like some rancher with a federal grazing permit I like to think I am an independent operator, but that just isn't the case.

> **7/5/95, Wednesday, Day 25**
> Came right up on a moose today. They (moose) may look prehistoric but there is a very purposeful even graceful way they move through the heavy cover. We were very attuned to looking for bear sign, what with all the fuss over permits. So it struck me funny that we'd walk right up on these moose. They looked at us indignantly as if they couldn't believe there was a creature so slow and clumsy in this world as us. It's a look as if right then

> they wished they were predators just so they could chase our ass up a tree. See how your mind works in griz country?

Jiri and I made decent time through Yellowstone. The weather was good with mostly afternoon thunderstorms to break up what was otherwise sunny. The entire greater Yellowstone had received record snows that winter and there was still snowpack in the higher elevations. It was still early July and there were great puddles at the receding feet of languid dirty drifts of snow at the base of trees. All that water made for amazing mosquito breeding grounds. They were thick night and day, but especially in the evenings when we wanted to relax. Mosquitoes like the cool transition hours, too.

There were a couple of times when they made enjoyment of the trip almost impossible. Even lathered with Deet, a highly toxic bug repellent that leaves an acrid numb taste in your mouth, it was hard to maintain sanity while hiking. Sweat almost instantly removes the layer of bug dope you coat on so you find yourself hiking in long sleeves and long pants sweating your ass off and swatting the bare areas your hat and scarf don't cover. Any hills or other features of the trail that would normally make for a tough grunt became awesome tests of character and personal fortitude under such conditions.

Once following Jiri up a hill just off the South side of Shoshone Lake, I got fed-up with the pace he was leading. I was swatting and sighing and grunting and cursing, and I thought I'd go out of my mind. So I kind of bolted past him and said I didn't think I could take much more of his pace so I was going to just run on ahead. Of course, it was just a thinly veiled attempt to capture the cool air I was sure Jiri was experiencing positioned in front, because we both knew I was running nowhere.

My selfishness was a waste of time but it took my mind off the bugs and gave me a small mental advantage I'd lacked just moments before. So I pushed along and swatted my shoulders and talked to myself in an unintelligible gibberish, dreaming of squashing every bug on me in one perfect swipe and concocting massive air strikes with Agent Orange bombers, laying a cool deadly mist over the entire park. Yeah, that's it. Chemical warfare the little fuckers.

We stomped along until we came to an empty campsite on the other side of a good-sized creek. I didn't even bother trying to find a place to cross and wadded through with my mind set on getting the tent pitched. Jiri and I said nothing as we set camp and cooked supper and built a smoky fire in a vain attempt to put them down. We retired to the tent much sooner than normal and lay there hot and miserable unable to sleep.

There were mosquitoes in the tent and that was unacceptable. We spent a good deal of time each evening spotting them with our head lamps and smearing them against the sides of the tent with a jacket or shirt. We weren't to be bothered in our sleep and there were long streaks of blood spattered all over the inside nylon walls of the tent, more testament to the bugs' success than to our prowess as exterminators. Out of nowhere in the silence Jiri said deadpan, "These little fuckers sure test my biocentric world view." There was a long hot silence and then we both broke out laughing. But only for a minute.

When we'd walked another day to Heart Lake and discovered the area full of the first backpackers I'd seen all summer, we decided to stick our heads in the ranger cabin and smooth any feathers we may have ruffled by not having an appropriate permit for a designated campsite. Certain parts of Yellowstone, Heart Lake being one of them, get lots of hiking traffic through the summer since it is an easy overnight or two night loop from the South Gate Highway. We had a permit; but since we'd not seen any Rangers, we had been lax about following it diligently and subsequently had found ourselves a day ahead of our official itinerary. Jiri thought stopping to ask was sure suicide and would only bring trouble. Normally I would agree with him, but I thought I recognized the old guy at the cabin and that we'd be OK.

It turned out I did know the Ranger. It was Joel Scrafford an ex -Fish and Wildlife Service game warden whom I knew from my work at The Wilderness Society. For more than a decade Joel had been responsible for monitoring and enforcing restriction on grizzly bears. Like a bounty officer, he hunted up and apprehended people who saw themselves above the law and illegally poached the bears. He had detractors from all sides of grizzly politics. Hard-core

bear activists thought he was too soft on violators, and ranchers thought he was too soft on bears. But he had a reputation for having little patience for D.C. bureaucrats and even less interest in kissing up to them. I remembered liking the guy and his gruff but easygoing western style.

He invited us onto the porch of the little cabin just as it started to rain and introduced us to his smiling wife Pat. She wore clean straight-leg Levi's and a bright red-checked shirt as fresh as a picnic. Joel told us he had retired a year ago from the Fish and Wildlife Service and that he and Pat liked to volunteer during the summers as backcountry Rangers. They rotate cabins from Shoshone Lake, Heart Lake and the Thoroughfare on the south arm of Yellowstone Lake, filling in the six days of each month the regular seasonal rangers get off from their duties.

Pat said, "We get the best duty of all. Spend a week at each of the three best cabins in the park and then we get ten days off."

"Sounds like a good deal to me." I said.

"Of course, we don't get paid. But Joel pulls in a nice government pension, and we like the idea of giving something back with our free time." She was the nicest person I had talked with in weeks, and she had about her an innocence that belied the 65 years I guessed she was.

Joel added, "It didn't hurt that I was willing to pull a little rank to get such a sweet assignment. But there are fewer people willing to volunteer free time back here than you might imagine."

They gave us a tour of the cabin which entailed their holding the door open while Jiri and I took turns peering into the dark little room. It was two bunks, a wood stove, a table with maps and two old fashioned gas lanterns. No electricity. Joel said in the back room was a kitchen with a wash basin and a gravity-fed water filter.

Pat got so excited when we told them we were walking across the park that she invited us to dinner. She wanted to hear all about our trip. Joel reminded her that they'd already invited another camp for cocktails and that maybe we'd better join them for breakfast. They

told us to pitch our tents down on the beach, something that was not only against park policy, but struck me as unwise in grizzly country. When I mentioned this to Joel he said not to worry.

"I don't plan on turning you in, and there is only one old boar who visits this beach and he's not due back for another four days." He added with a quick smile, "Of course, if he does come back he'll probably just walk a wide path around you smell so bad."

Joel and Pat's was such a refreshing attitude compared to the hype and fear the Park disseminates from Headquarters.

Jiri and I spread our bags on the beach and as promised there was just enough breeze to keep the mosquitoes down. A great yellow stripe of pollen dust had washed up on the beach reminder of the yellow cloud we'd watched blow across the lake earlier that day. It was pollen from the slopes of pine trees we could see on the far side of Heart Lake. Two great scattered rafts of Canadian geese dabbled in the next wave of yellow film some forty feet from shore and half a dozen white pelicans drifted about not unaware of our presence. It was so nice to find relief from the bugs and to be in a place where we could just sit and watch.

7/10/95, Monday, Day 30
I'm sitting here thinking about how Mom and Dad might chose to deny the fact that the kind of blatant viceral killing and waste that occured on the plains when settlers desimated the great bison populations and wiped out whole indiginous populations of human beings is still going on today. They might chose to agree in the abstract. Like they could probably imagine some callous corporation in the jungles of the Amazon actually paying some low rent latin american thug army to harrass these poor "backward" people off the land so they can explore for oil.

But I am not sure they can really get their minds around the idea that what they do for a living is the same thing as the pioneers killing the bison. Though Dad isn't involved with any properties with endangered species on them, his line of work keeps him aware of his colegues who are building housing developments in costal gnat-catcher habitat, construct business parks and golf courses in california desert kangaroo rat denning habitat. The only difference is that desert rats and gnat catchers are not the carismatic mega-fauna that the vast herds of bison used to be. But the mindset is the same. These species aren't important compared to mans need to keep up apperances.

Seeing Joel and Pat in their cabin got me thinking about my parents. I thought of how much they would enjoy spending a summer out in the woods like that. Away from the business of their lives, living simply but comfortably outdoors, a small cabin for shelter from the weather. I thought of them at the small house on their property in Colorado; living there part time, carrying in drinking water, the only heat from a wood stove. I told myself I'd seen a change come about them over the last few years. They seemed to take great pleasure from the little things in their lives.

But then they announced they were building a new house on the place. Discussion of it made me angry and so I tried to remove myself from talk of the ranch and especially of the house. It didn't make sense to me. There already were two houses on the place. One for them and one for the young couple that lived there. I did not begrudge them the full-time live-in caretaker, I had no visions of my mother and father going retro and becoming homesteaders. But they have a big house in Denver and so a little one in the mountains seemed enough to me. I guess I didn't see any reason that they might need another.

They built, in fact, were building as I hiked, a huge 5000 sq ft home with three floors, a sauna, two steam baths, five bathrooms and a two car garage. They hired a world reknown "mountain home" architect from California to design it, and it was built of flagstone, quarried in Colorado and western red cedar, cut from the Pacific Northwest. At a dinner party in the Spring my mother had the audacity to bad-mouth a rich man in Aspen for building a huge ten thousand square foot house using marble for floors and partition walls. It is easy now to see through the thinly veiled guilt hidden in her comment, but at the time I was outraged.

She'd exclaimed, "Marble. My god, can you imagine building such a huge house with something as insensitive as marble?"

I wanted to say "Sure mom, how about western red cedar? At least the guy used a local material. He at least used a stone quarried in Colorado while you draped your home in endangered spotted owl habitat. Way to go Mom."

At the time my mother's cousin had said, "It's all about materials isn't it Pam," which might be an interesting thing to say. But her language was cultivated in a glossy magazine, and she said it with deep earnestness as if to emphasize the great appreciation she had for modern architecture. It was straight from the pages of Architectural Digest. Tasteful, gracious, educated women, incapable of confronting the moral dilemma of being rich and privileged so they busy themselves building new homes instead. Pretentious bullshit.

"It's all about materials isn't it?" Yeah it sure is. Materials and arrogance and such a twisted self-image they feel the need to build castles to themselves regardless of the consequences. What the hell, kill off some indigenous peoples and a few endangered species and make way for you and your kind.

And so the entire weight and tragedy of western history came down on my mother's head. Whoa. I wrote in my journal that night that I think I have some issues I need to clear up with my Mom.

We walked out of the lodgepole and up over Outlet Pass and down onto the south shore of Yellowstone Lake where we came into some of the wildest feeling country so far of the trip. The south arm of the lake was officially closed for another two weeks for grizzly security; and so there hadn't been anyone back there since the previous fall. The trails were scattered with down-fall and it rained off and on all day. We saw lots of moose, mostly solitary young males. We saw lots of bear sign. Tracks, diggings, turned up stumps and logs.

We hiked down to the South shore in the rain but to the north across the lake there was clear sky and a wonderful light as we pitched our tent below a massive dead Douglas Fir tree. We walked up on a huge flock of Canadian geese which were in molt and padded nervous and chattering in front of us down into the lake in a goggling twitter. We saw a small band of about six elk swim across an inlet on the other side of the lake and watched them shake the water from their sleek bodies and return to their quiet grazing.

That night when we were tired and relaxed, Jiri finally told me about how he had fled Checkloslovakia. I had wanted him to tell me ever since I'd met him. When he was around seventeen years old, he and a friend traveled to Romania where citizens of Eastern Block countries were allowed to travel with certain permission. Once there, in a sort of blind, juvenile attempt which Jiri described as stupid, they tried to walk into Greece. He said they were on a road at the top of a mountain pass and discovered a border guard station where they were simply apprehended.

The Romanian Police took Jiri and his friend to jail arresting them for traveling without visas. They spent two months in jail there before being deported back to Czechloslovakia, where they spent another two months in a Prague prison before being released. When he was released, it was into a remedial vocational program for underachievers, which struck me as comical. Jiri decided he'd finish school, and so to occupy his fertile mind, he and friends sought out banished literature and committed their evenings to re-typing books at night and distributing them among their underground cafe friends. Finally, five or so years later he earned the right to another vacation and so this time chose a trip to a fat farm in then Yugoslavia.

Jiri is a mountaineer and remarkably fit so it seems to say a lot about the inept or lagging enthusiasm of the Eastern Block that they didn't suspect something was up when he signed on for two weeks at a Yugoslavian fat farm. When everyone got off the bus and took a left turn into the spa, Jiri and a friend turned right and hiked up over the Carnic Alps and down into Italy.

Sitting there at the fire listening to Jiri tell his story, I thought of my own high school years when the closest thing we did to challenging the establishment was toilet-papering the inside of the school auditorium. We did a very thorough job, mind you, but we were just being naughty, "rebellious." It seems a rather hollow gesture considering that people were struggling for the right to read books in Europe.

Jiri was very articulate about the tragic numbers of people who spent an entire life kowtowing to the communist power just so they and their family could get a car or a TV or special privileges. He related the frustrating terror and fear in which his family lived as dissidents, afraid a neighbor might turn them in for holding an unpopular opinion. Which is so interesting to me because it seems that's exactly how most Americans behave. Sure we're allowed to say and read almost anything we want, but look at how we line up and march to the store. Look at the bitter disdain we hold for those who blockade the road into Wal Mart to save an endangered salamander. Look how we arm ourselves in fear of losing our ability to shop.

Jiri said his excitement for the end of the Cold War only lasted as long as it took him to go back and visit. He was quick to see how Western culture was moving in there. Subdivisions were flying up and a country bent on consumption opened its doors to McDonald's and KFC. Yes, people seemed open and free now to make choices, but their choice seems to be building suburban culture. And what kind of choice is that? Jiri seemed to think is was no choice at all. He said, "It's depressing. They are simply replacing one totalitarian regime with another." Think about it.

There is a deep musky flavor to the way elk smell and there is an equally strong but different odor bears carry. We smelled lots of both as we walked the next morning up out of the mixed conifer onto the Two Ocean Plateau, really a series of plateaus that reach from the park all the way south into the Bridger National Forest and the Buffalo Fork of the Snake River. This is grand subtle country full of huge white bark pine, douglas fir and silver bellied engleman spruce. There is something curious about the level altitude and quiet topography which somehow defies how rugged it is.

We got up top around 10,000 feet and got a broad view of the Grand Teton way to the west. The next day we crossed the southern end of the plateau and dropped into Fox Park. There was something about walking out of Yellowstone with a view of the Wind Rivers and

Gros Ventre ranges to the south and a spectacular long distant view of the Tetons to the west that was remarkably powerful. Here I was walking past like Jim Coulter or Jeremia Johnson, arriving on foot, at a speed which seemed appropriate of another age or time. I had seen the Tetons a hundred times. Driven by them, hiked and skied in them, I'd even roller bladed at the base of them along the Jenny Lake road before it opens in the Spring, but none of those things prepared me for the powerful feeling of walking past them on day 35 of my trip some 40 miles away on the Two Ocean Plateau.

Jiri was in a grumpy mood which in my revere I ignored. We'd been wading on and off for the past two days through knee-deep snow and slush. But the view of the Tetons was all I needed, and, mindless of the half mile, I walked out of our way for a better view. I was so ginned up by the prospect that not even Jiri in a dark funk could effect my mood, and I waxed exuberant like a little kid. I was jumping around from rock to rock talking about mountain men, glacier lilies, shooting stars and the psychological health benefits of mountain walking. He caught the fever, and soon enough we were making time down the southern flank of Two Ocean Pass like kids skipping under seventy pound packs, criss-crossing Two Ocean creek.

In the National Forest south of the park we began to see more and more people in the backcountry. The Bridger Teton is a very popular area with the horse packing crowd, and we at once began to see sign of them everywhere. We passed at least three major commercial pack-strings with guests, dudes, wranglers, cooks and all, totaling more than thirty head of livestock. The evidence of these animals was everywhere, especially where the trail crossed wet areas and creeks. There were great swaths of braided trails, seven wide where the track had gotten too worn and so the animals moved over. These places looked like great muddy highways.

Jiri and I found it easy to get annoyed at these tourists and their outfitters catering to their every want and need. But it was too easy to scoff at the corporate men who fly into Jackson, stay the night in a fancy hotel and then get swept up to a trailhead in a luxurious gas

guzzling suburban to be taken out into the country. Easy to hate them in their ignorance and arrogance, but the country wouldn't let me.

I had been on one of those very same pack trips as a kid with my Dad. Fifteen of us had ridden from Togwotee Pass up over Two Ocean Creek down onto the Thoroughfare and into the Park. A two week pack trip on horses, some thirty head in all. We rode along the east side of Yellowstone Lake and up into Pelican Creek, and I loved it. We knew little of environmentally correct behavior and spent the days fishing for cutthroat trout and delighting at the terrible possibility of seeing a grizzly bear. I secretly adored my father for singling me out from my brothers and sisters and taking me with him.

So who am I to begrudge the rich tourists? As we passed them mostly I found myself hoping they'd have a great trip and that some day down the line they have as many fond memories as I do.

One of the small private pack outfits we met were two men and their four sons riding the best looking and well broken horses I may have ever seen. They were clean, neat, alert animals that carried themselves quietly along the trail, and I immediately thought of my father and the great admiration and respect he has for well broken horses. A good horse and rider are like an athletic team emanating posture, grace and respect, and I noted how all the riders, even the boys displayed an efficiency of movement that only comes from hours spent in a saddle.

"Your horses sure are well behaved," I said as the first rider road past me on the trail below the small switch back at my feet.

"Too bad they're Appaloosas." I added waiting to see his reaction.

The first man, a large steady working man with an easy smile stopped his horse and grinned at me as the second rider approached.

"This fella's an Appy snob, Jimmy," he said to the second man as he pulled his horse up short. The horse stood quietly with its head held level. There were two men and four boys and all six were equally well mounted. They had matching hair cuts, wrangler jeans and t-shirts. I

wondered if they were from a family of Mormons. All had working saddles and tack; low shouldered roping trees with inner tube wrap on the horns, faded red and blue cotton looped reins, and wore either white straw cowboy hat or a mesh truckers cap. There was no extra gear present and their pack horses moved easily under tightly packed white bundles secured with neat diamond hitches.

They were friendly men and from my comment recognized in me a shared knowledge of who they were and where they were from that made the meeting worthwhile no matter however short it was. For the second time in a day I thought of my father and all he had ever done for me, and I was crushed by an immense happiness that bordered on sad. It had been a big day.

Great Divide Basin

About half way down the Wind River range I noticed on my map a place called Hay Pass. I may have never noticed it among the hundreds of passes that cross the Divide along my route, but Hay was a name I had seen before. In fact Mary Hay was the woman to whom I had sent my next box of food. Her address was a PO Box in Rock Springs, Wyoming, but I'd been informed she had a homestead cabin on the Sweetwater River, not ten miles East of South Pass. When I'd talked to her on the phone back in May, she'd enthusiastically volunteered her place as a re-supply point and only added that she hoped I would plan to stay over when I got there.

"I don't get many guests out here," she said cheerily over the phone. "Come August I will probably appreciate some company."

But at the moment I was still three days hiking from South Pass and had some steep country yet to cover in the south end of the Winds. I made a mental note of Hay Pass, and Hay Reservoir and as I put my map away I looked forward to meeting Mary Hay and asking her about her family and their history.

The transition from hiking the mountainous terrain of the Wind River range to walking the relatively flat and open country of the Great Divide Basin is quite pronounced, almost instant, and one of the more noticeable changes on the trip. It seemed one minute I was hiking a mountain trail and the next I was on a two-track jeep road winding its way through the rabbit brush and sage. In the mountains the views seem to constantly change and evolve, walking through forests, then meadows, along cliff faces and streams. Whereas in the desert the view seems to stay the same all day long, a trick of space and the imagination.

That first morning walking away from the south end of Temple Peak down Little Sandy creek and out into the open low hills which flank the Sweetwater river was difficult and

seemed to take forever. No matter how fast I walked, no matter that my pace was the same or even faster than the day before, the visual pace had changed and the difference proved a real challenge. That I was a month and a half into the trip helped, I was physically and mentally much tougher than when I started and perhaps better prepared for this most recent and perhaps greatest difficulty of the trip -- how to occupy my mind and keep from growing impatient on this next leg through the desert.

The Great Divide Basin can be described as where the Great Plains to the east and the Great Basin Desert to the west overlap each other in southern Wyoming creating a broad flat gap between the Northern and Central Rocky Mountains. It is the dry wind-swept country that typifies Wyoming, once an ancient sea-bed where now the Continental Divide quite literally splits in two forming a 200 square mile basin which drains only to itself. On the northern edge of this basin, where the Wind Rivers begin their push to Yellowstone, South Pass crosses the divide on the flank of the Sweetwater River. It is one of the most culturally and historically significant locations in the west, and as I drew closer I found myself excited.

I knew how important South Pass was in paving the way for the pioneers. The Oregon, California and Mormon Trails all crossed it in the exodus west. But the European trails were not the first. There were many men and beasts before them. As I walked along that day I was haunted by great ghost herds of bison, pronghorn antelope, and elk. I thought of the numerous bands of Native Americans who used the pass way before any mountain men or settlers ever recognized it as an obvious place to move through the country, and I found myself a little sad.

It is difficult in the wide open to judge how far you've gone or keep going in exactly the right direction. So I'd aim for one of many stone monuments built by Basque sheep herders who work the country. The piles of rocks are landmarks, helping the herder's orientation on the prairie. Building them keeps the men occupied during the long timeless days watching sheep. The beacons first appear as small black dots on the far horizon at times as much as ten miles distance. As I drew closer I noticed their dark looming bodies are spotted yellow and orange with lichen, weathered by countless seasons in the wind and cold.

I imagined these wonderful stacks of rocks were grave markers along the Oregon Trail, which was a little bit haunting because they are a strong reminder that someone once walked there long ago. And while this idea is not exactly scary, there is something about the immense openness of the country that makes the memory of these past visitors strange. In the tedium of walking in the open, my imagination turned to hardship and wagon trains, to hatred and fear, and with time on my hands I'd let my imagination roll.

I imagined seeing a wagon and a team of oxen parked about a mile away on the far side of the river. A woman in a dirty dusty dress, her hair pulled back in a braid is changing a crying child's diaper, another child at her feet. She is busy and purposeful, letting her task draw her attention away from the wagon where a man, her husband, is furiously whipping an older boy, their son. Her husband is a large handsome man in his hat, jacket and canvas pants, and he carries himself in a manner which evokes a certain purpose or truth.

It seems the boy was dozing in the saddle and let the oxen drift up the wrong-trail, their thick blunt muzzles following water. The man had told his son it was important to follow the main trail, but in his boredom, the boy absent-mindedly let the oxen wander. When his father approached him yelling what in god's name he thought he was doing, the boy withdrew. While he couldn't help listen to the harsh words hurled at him and he found that if he fixed his eye on the far horizon and imagined the distant wind or sound there, his father's words might seem not for him, almost too distant to hear.

"Sorry, sir. I must have been looking the wrong way."

"Looking where? Where else could you have possibly thought it was more important to be looking than where I told you to be looking."

The boy glances at his father and then looks down at his feet and mumbles, "We've not gone a mile. It won't take us two hours to get back..."

Whack!

The father backhands the boy's cheek and tells him not to sass.

"I'll be the judge of whether or not this will be all right. In God's name son what could you have been thinking? Were you thinking? Were you listening? Do you know how to listen? Do you know how to pay attention? Or is this just another example of what a pitiful, worthless chore you are."

The boy stands frozen. Ashamed.

"Don't be an absent-minded fool, boy," the father says as he strips the reins from the bridle on the big roan mare his son was riding. "You know the routine."

The boy unbuttons his shirt and drapes it down his waist his hands gripping the rim of the wagon wheel as the father wraps the reins in his right hand and begins to slowly, steadily whip his son's back. But the boy does not cower nor does he cringe with each lash. He's gotten so he doesn't really feel the pain. The whippings are by far easier to endure than the never ending barrage of verbal abuse that seems to weigh each day down. The fact his father thinks he is lazy and stupid and worthless stings more than any lash ever could more even than his lovely mother sitting there with the children pretending not to notice.

He couldn't remember how many times they'd said they were ashamed of him and it had gotten so he could not bring himself to get out of his bedroll in the morning. And so he would lie there watching the first pale light grow above the prairie. Listening. Waiting for the sharp cold toe of his father's boot to kick him in the ribs rousting his sorry ass out of bed. He was sure that any morning any day now his parents would just leave him in their disgust. Leave him, a despondent heap. There in the clay and grass and dirt of the long highly celebrated trail to the promised land. No pile of rocks, no shepherd's beacon celebrating his short unhappy life.

As I watched this scene in my imagination, I wondered if the boy told himself his father really loved him. I wonder if he knew that in his anger his father was only a scared, terrified boy himself, worried about water and Indians, unconsciously venting his frustration on his son. Too proud or too ignorant to admit that the boy's absent-minded behavior only reminded the man of himself and the grave danger he'd put his family in. Each slash across

the boy's back carrying the anxiety and fear of selling everything you own, leaving home and not knowing where you are, feeling exposed and vulnerable there on the windblown prairie. Did the boy know his father loved him or did he only feel the hurt and humiliation of standing there naked and whipped in front of his mother and sisters and whole world to see?

I try to imagine exhaustedly eating dust day after day with the dull hope and dream of progress fading replaced instead by a growing fear of nightfall, the unknown and a burning desire to lay down and quit.

Does he see beyond this degradation or does he believe he is lazy and stupid and thoughtless, not worth the food he's fed. Would the boy grow and flourish despite his parents behavior , their fear , their cowardice? Would he grow up angry and incapable of helping himself? Would the physical challenge and stimulation of moving slowly across the continent be missed, the subtle changes of the landscape, the boredom, vagaries of weather, degrees of slope and pitch of hill, the fording of creeks and rivers longed for once the family comes to rest? Will he arrive the dark wet woods of Oregon and the great Northwest and be inclined to leave, or will his good nature endure and propel him into a life of labor. Will the life around him sustain him? Or will he just put his head down and forget, put his head down, ignore his pain and get busy clearing trees?

Yes, I passed countless miles dreaming up people whose histories exist yet whom I know nothing about. Histories that some hundred and fifty summers and winters have covered up or blown over yet still cling there part of the present, my present. I am quite aware of the implications of such thoughts and what they may or may not say about my own frustration and anger with *my* father and mother, and I am at least partially aware of the obvious, even typical feelings of powerlessness such anger represents. But I wonder if anyone recognizes how true or real or right such anger is. Where were the wives who said, "No, what we are doing is wrong." Where are the sons and daughters who told their parents, "Fuck-off, I am not going with you." The propensity for people in America to deny their own hurt and anger astounds me

and much of the time I am left with nothing but a gaping sadness and longing for something more.

Sitting there alone on the ground with the grass, my pack and the cloudless sky I knew not what to do. So I picked myself up and sang. "Home, Home on the Range" I think it was. "Where never is heard a discouraging word." And I imagined myself this large wandering lunatic singing to no one as he zigzaged through the great reefs of sage. Singing out loud, there on the Oregon Trail where so much American history flows through a dry exposed gap in the heart of our Country.

> **8/5/95 Day 51**
> When you drive through or fly over Wyoming you are probably deceiving yourself. The tendency is to see and imagine a vast windswept country covered in sage brush and antelope. A remote and desolate place. A place that is uninhabited for good reason. Even reading about Wyoming is deceiving. Promotional literature boasts of the less than 450,000 residents occupying the 8th largest state in the union, all of which is true. But these are deceptions of the imagination because Wyoming is full of people. You just have to slow down and look around a bit.

When I finally arrived to South Pass having spent an entire weary day walking along the broad open sage country of the Oregon Trail, I was still five or six miles from Mary Hay's cabin. I crossed the Sweetwater River a mile above a solar powered visitor's center the Wyoming Highway Department has on the road between Farson and Lander. There was no phone at the visitor's center, and the old Hispanic woman who lived there didn't think Mary Hay was home. So instead of walking on out to her place, I decided to hitch a ride into Lander. I was out of food and it had been 15 days since my last shower in Dubois, Wyoming so I figured I'd take a break before heading out across the Red Desert. Turned out I walked almost as far on the highway as I would have to Mary's cabin before getting a ride from a house painter in a pickup. He told me I was lucky he picked me up because I was looking pretty grubby and tourists are the only ones on the highway and none of them were inclined to pick up some grubby guy standing out in the wind.

Lander proved less a respite than I had hoped, though I wasn't ten minutes out of a shower at a little road side motel before I fell asleep. The Pizza Hut delivery guy knocked three or four times and finally had to have the Lady at the front desk ring my room. I ate four slices of the Meat-Eater's Combo before passing out in front of the boob tube. I had not been able to get enough sleep in the past few weeks. It was a cycle I was discovering to all this hiking. One week I'd be energized and feeling strong, and then another I'd feel lazy, like I couldn't get enough sleep. I was also losing weight at a rapid pace. My friends didn't think I was eating enough though I assured them I was filling up on cheeseburgers and chocolate shakes whenever I'd get to a town. Not the best fare but I was craving fatty foods, and I saw no reason to fight the urge the few times I got to towns. While out on the trail I could get in my bag at dark and sleep ten hours until the heat drove me out, but I still was tired all the time.

After spending a day and a half in Lander doing laundry and just hanging out I hitched a ride back out to South Pass with a cowboy from New Jersey who works for the National Outdoor Leadership School. I am so amused by someone like this guy Mike. I mean where is it written that when you move to Wyoming you've got to start wearing a cowboy hat and boots? Since when did the costume make the man. Anyway, he dropped me off on the highway and I walked the four or five miles from there to Mary Hay's small wooden homestead on the south bank of the Sweetwater River. I got there and wasn't sure I had the right place because no one was home and I, for some reason, expected more by way of a ranch house. This little log home was all there was. No barn, no pens, nothing but the little house, a sheepherder's wagon and an outhouse. And, of course, the wind and the view of the mountains. After waiting outside for about a half an hour the sun started getting hot so I propped my pack against the fence and let myself in, careful not to touch much of anything.

I stayed the night at Mary's in the tin-roofed sheepherder's wagon she keeps next to her house. There was a warm wind blowing that evening so I kept the small frame window and the double frame door cracked open for the breeze. I watched the heat lightening to the west over what I presumed was the Green River basin and for the first time since I started thought

about the end of my trip. I was still a long way from being finished . I wondered what it would be like to be Mary. To spend day after day in the country maybe driving here and there but essentially staying put. I have been moving around for more then a decade ever since I left my parents home to go to college, I had never spent more than two years in any one location, never more than twelve months in the same house or apartment.

Mary told me she had grown up on a ranch not 45 miles away from there and aside from a brief stint in Missouri when she got married she'd always lived in the desert. She told me she doesn't go into the mountains to escape the heat and she's generally not interested in them. I thought of the thousands of people who frequent the Wind River range and the National Parks each year, and here was a woman (and her father) who could care less for such things even as close as they are to them. She likes the desert. Didn't like the mountains. I didn't know if that was true or if it was some self-imposed restriction, a test to show herself and others how tough she and her family are, how. Hard to tell not really knowing her. But my questions tell me a lot about myself.

Could I ever be so committed to a place? What keeps me from sinking roots? Why did I feel obliged to pick up all the time and move? There were many places along my route that were interesting to me, but here I was walking through them all. So maybe I expanded my view of home to include; all the rocky mountains, the west, the western desert. How realistic is it to call so much space home?

I stayed the next morning much longer than I would have, but her father, Mary referred to him as Leonard, wanted to meet me. So I agreed to wait thinking he was on his way. After about four hours, I finally decided I should get on my way and so I walked out of her house and headed straight south for the Oregon Buttes and the little spring Mary had shown me on the map. Dickie Springs. It is just East of the buttes and sits a mile or so below the actual divide on the northern rim of the Great Divide Basin.

I may have only walked a mile or two when a brand new red Toyota four-wheel-drive truck came driving up, honking, the driver unconcerned that he was not following a track, just

driving on open ground. He pulled up, stopped the truck and turned off the engine. A thin elderly man in tan pants, blue oxford shirt and dirty beige golfers hat stepped out, walked very purposefully my direction and announced, "Leonard Hay"

I held out my hand and said, "Pleased to meet you, I'm Woody Beardsley." I was a little shocked because from talking with Mary I was expecting more of a cowboy or rancher type, and Leonard appeared little more than a well rested retiree with red cheeks. The only thing that even remotely hinted at his being a rancher was the little note pad and pen he kept in his shirt chest pocket.

"Say, Mary tells me you walked here from Montana. Can you imagine that? Damn it, I told her not to lie to her 83 year old father," he said with a wry smile.

"Well, it's true," I returned. "I walked here from Missoula, Montana."

"The hell." he said astonished. "How long you been out?"

"About 45 days. That includes days-off for groceries and showers."

He kind of walked around and looked me over and said, "My god, what's that fucking pack weigh?"

And I laughed not so much surprised by his language, but in deference to it. "About 70-75 pounds right now."

"Well for Christ's sake man, put the damn thing down. You got a minute to talk? I want to know your plans." And he motioned me towards the rear of his truck.

"Well, sure," I said as he walked me back and let down the tailgate.

"I don't want to hear any bullshit from you about this being a god-damned Jap rig (the truck was a Toyota). Been driving Fords all over this country for more than fifty years. Finally found one worth the price. You see I get a new one every year and sell the old one back."

I was smiling because he was talking to himself as much as to me, a manner I found charming.

"Thought I'd never see the day I'd drive a rice-burner. Used to be I'd rather see them Japs go to hell, but I couldn't afford not to. Boys down at the Outlaw give me no end of hell."

"What's the Outlaw?" I asked amused.

"Bar in Rock Springs. I'm eighty-three but I still like a few pops with the boys."

I put down my pack and sat down, and before he sat, he put his hand on my shoulder and said, friendly, "You know Mary tells me you're an environmentalist." I kept smiling, waiting.

He said, "I have yet to meet one of you sonsabitches I ever agreed with," he raised his eyebrows in a smile, teasing, "but I never pass up the chance to give one my opinion whenever I can."

And before I could laugh or respond as would seem appropriate, he said, turning with a gesture of his arm, " You see, this country is in prime condition. Haven't had a summer like this in years. Wet. Real wet. I'll bet you had snow in the Wind Rivers?" He asked, and then before I could answer said, "Say, you ever heard of Bruce Babbit?"

I nodded, amused at his ability to cover so many subjects..

"Well, I'm suing that sonofabitch as we speak. Filed papers on him yesterday."

I got a kick at the thought of this old man suing the Department of Interior, so I said, "What for?"

"Grazing fees. He's trying to put every fucking last one of us out of business."

"Really?"

"You see you can't penalize a fellow here in Wyoming for what some thieving scoundrel's getting away with in Nevada. It just ain't fair. So we're suing the bastard."

I was following him so far. The Department of Interior has jurisdiction over the Bureau of Land Management. The BLM owns every other section of that part of Wyoming and countless acres across the entire west including most of Nevada. There'd been lots of complaining over the past year and a half, ever since Bruce Babbit's proposed increase in grazing fees (an increase that wouldn't even bring public range up to the same price as private range). The complaints were that all ranchers were being penalized for the excesses of a few.

I assumed Leonard owned a few private sections near where we were, but I wanted to know who he was working with. So I asked. "Who do you mean when you say, 'we?'"

"Rock Springs Grazing Association. Well, both the RSGA and the Rawlings Grazing Association. They have the other half of the basin here. We hired lawyers at the Mountain States Legal Foundation."

Noting my smile, he asked, "Heard of them?"

"Oh, you bet." I said trying to curb my tendency for wit. "It's just that in the circles I hang out in, the Mountain States Legal Foundation is paramount to the devil."

"Now, why is that?" Leonard asked, a serious look on his face.

"Well, some argue that the Mountain States Legal Foundation is nothing but an intimidating legal front for rich guys and corporations. They think they don't give a damn about the countryside. Say they only care about big business and money."

"Well that could be, but you can't blame a fella for protecting his interests."

"No." I said smiling then added, "But I suppose that depends on what a fella's interests are and whether they come crosswise to mine." I looked at him, and his look seemed to ask, "How do you mean," so I said, "Being a tax-payer I guess the way I see it is that every other section from here to the Interstate is effectively mine (the public's) and I don't think it's right that my sections are overgrazed by my next door neighbor." I said this in the same friendly tone he'd used with me moments before.

"Well, good! Damn good." Leonard said genuinely pleased. "You and I will get along fine. Just damn fine. So why don't you load your stuff in the truck and I'll drive you across this country and you can see what great fucking care we're taking of it?"

I laughed and said, "I can't. If I got in the truck and drove across here with you that wouldn't exactly be walking across this country now would it? Besides, I'd wind up way ahead of myself."

So Leonard told me where to find water and pointed out all the springs along the way. Hay springs, Hay Reservoir, John Hay Reservoir, Chicken Springs, Oregon Buttes, Bush Rim Steamboat Mountain, Freighter gap, Black Rock Butte, Jim Bridger Power plant, I-80 and points beyond.

"Well, at least let me take you the mile and a half up to the edge of the basin. That way you can look down into all we're talking about instead of looking at this crummy map." So I consented and we closed up the tailgate.

As I went to sit in the truck I was startled by a black furry ball in the passenger seat, which I realized must be his dog.

"That's Fred. Say hi, Freddy. Fred here is one of a very few longhaired Dachshunds in the entire state of Wyoming. The only black one. Got a sister in Gillette. She's red. Freddy likes air-conditioning so don't worry if he makes a move for your lap. He's only trying to position for a vent."

As we drove the short mile up to the Continental Divide and looked into the vast distance south that is the Great Divide Basin, Leonard talked.

"You see in the desert you gotta manage for the lean years. Even on a good year like this one we never run more cattle than can be sustained during the end of a seven year drought. Don't make any sense otherwise. Same with sheep. Right now Mary's got a permit for 1200 pairs, but that's way more than should ever be out here so we only run 450. That way we're never over-extended when the bad years come. Damn market's in the shitter. We wont get $35 per hundred weight this Fall. But just think how worse off we'd be if we had twice as many cows. Twice the loss. And that Bastard Babbit wants to double our costs over-night because a bunch of urban do-gooders are screaming bloody murder? They don't give a rat's ass about the handful of us doing a good job."

And that was not all. He talked animatedly about the federal government, Bruce Babbit, that cocksucker Bill Clinton and his shovey though-I-think-she's-a damn-sight-smarter-than-he-is wife, Hillary, and the disturbing trend he saw in the Republican party and its views on abortion. "It ain't nobody's business 'cept the woman and the feller that got her that way." I didn't think an old man could talk so fast or so much, though I'm generally good at talking to folks. And even though I found myself longing for conversation at times during my

trip I never once felt like I'd even begin to bore Leonard with questions. His enthusiasm for the country was as big as the desert.

He finally told me he had to leave because he was to attend the 92nd birthday of an old friend. "We're going to have a few bourbon and sodas. Just two before dinner." Then he added with glee, " Ha! You should see the old broad. She looks like a witch. Scraggly gray hair down her back. Not but four teeth left in her head. Oh, she's a real beauty." He sat there a moment looking forward toward where I was headed. Then he looked over at me and repeated, "She's ninety two-today. Think we'll have a couple of bourbon and sodas." With a wave of his hand he drove away.

That night as I cooked my dinner by a small willow bush, the only semblance of a tree I'd seen all day, I kept thinking about Leonard's and my conversation about beef cows and grazing fees. I had worked for The Wilderness Society, and I knew the woman who was lobbying for the grazing fee increase. For the second time on this trip, I was reminded of the protests I'd participated in at Bruce Babbit's hearings. And I was still uncomfortable with my involvement. It wasn't that I thought what we were asking for was wrong, maybe it was just the way we asked.

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to see and know how destructive cattle are, how water-intensive their feed is and how much soil erosion, human and wildlife displacement and water and air pollution world-wide are a direct result of beef production. I knew from my studies that given human population trends that red meat production is inefficient and down right irresponsible. I knew that if we were doing things right on this planet we'd eat 90% less red meat and 90% more vegetable and legume protein, lentils and rice, corn and beans, third-world diets. But I also knew that saying any of this to Leonard would do no good. None of what I knew would change an eighty-three year old man set in his ways.

On one hand the fact that part of his and Mary's costs would double over-night did not really bother me. What did I care if they went out of business? Clearly, the fee increase was intended to curtail some of the worst overgrazing abuse by making it unaffordable. But I was

starting to wonder about my indifference. How is the vengeful "fuck them" attitude which the environmental movement views job displacement and economic hardship any different than the brash view industrial business interests take of wild nature? The two are the same. As long as the land users perceive their livelihood as threatened there would be little progress on the ground no matter how much the fee. Until we become more creative about people's work and income, showing them the same compassion we have for wildlife, then it would seem we've got a huge political problem to overcome.

> **7/31/95 Monday, Day 51**
>
> I can see steam billowing on the southern horizon. Must be the Jim Bridger power plant. Otherwise there is not a cloud in the sky. I know because I can see all of it. I'm laying up in the shade for lunch and a nap. Sitting at Freighter's Gap under a crude ramada built of my gray poncho, a ski pole, and the ditch bank on the side of the road. It's working quite well thank you. I'm re-reading Abbey; Desert Solitaire. Seemed appropriate.
>
> Everything else is nothing but light. Bright white light and heat The only shade I see is on the Northeast side of Black Rock Butte about 12 miles away. For some reason this oppressive mid-day heat flattens all the color out of the desert. All the color but bright white-blue, and yellow. Light. Too much light for color. Too much color for heat. It seems that all the color of the desert is hiding in the shade.
>
> This is the second great gray and yellow caterpillar I've seen today. The first was burrowing into the dirt of a two-track I was walking. This second just marched past my shady lean-two. It has twelve sections, each a leathery gray with two pointed bottle-brush whiskers symmetrically jutting off its body. Each of these luxurious whiskers is deep yellow and as I look back down for more detail I note the caterpillar has climbed over my pack and split.

He drove up as I was sitting on the side of the road on a hill right above the Jim Bridger power plant. I had run out of water early that morning and I had walked the last twelve miles without anything to drink. I was parched and tired and was contemplating how to get into the power plant to ask for water when Leonard drove up and said, "What the fuck are you doing here?"

"Just setting," I said with a smile.

"My cowboys told me you were dead. I'm on my way out to look for buzzards right now. How the hell did you get here?

"I walked."

"The hell.."

"Yes sir."

"The hell." He looked perplexed as if wondering, "Why?" Instead he said, "Well, my cowboys said you never checked in so I thought I'd come find your sorry ass."

I wanted to say, "Were you worried?" but instead I said, "Your cowboys weren't there. Note on the trailer made me think they were in at the rodeo."

"Well, damn. It just goes to show you can't get good help anymore." And he shook his head. Quiet. "But you walked all the way here?" He shook his head again. "Just damn me to hell." And he sat a minute looking out his windshield. "So what are you going to do now?"

"Well," I gestured past his truck "I thought I'd walk in to that stinking power plant and ask to fill my water bottle. Then I thought I'd walk out to the Interstate and hitch a ride down to Red Desert and get my next box of food."

"Well, shit," he sat thinking again, "why don't you come ride with me instead? You can have Freddy's bottle of water. I'll take you out to help me with my chores on the Little Bar X, and at the end of the day I'll drop you in Red Desert and your box."

I didn't have to think about it long. I said, "Sounds like a good plan," and I gathered my things and threw them in the back of his truck. As I got in the passenger seat, he handed he his little black dachshund to me with a smile. "Freddy boy missed you."

"Hello, Freddy, " I said, shifting him onto my lap.

"But I can't imagine why as bad as you smell. You skin a fucking badger out there?"

And so the afternoon began.

We drove past the massive open-pit coal mine that was the source of the coal burning in the Jim Bridger Power Plant. There was a three-story tall loading machine down in the pit with a loading crane that had a bucket on it the size of a house. Leonard told me the pit was

more than three miles long and didn't begin to even scrape the surface of all the coal that was out there. He told me a story about his daughter Mary. She has friends who work at the Wyoming Community College in Rock Springs and one of them asked her if it didn't break her heart to see the coal mine tearing up the desert she loves so much. As Leonard tells it, Mary said, "Why, no. Every time I drive by that mine I get a warm feeling inside knowing the severance taxes are paying for your job. I just love what the Community College offers the town of Rock Springs."

I said, "Yeah, the mining executives love it too."

He laughed and said, "That's right. But I don't suppose you give a shit that that damn coal is low sulfur coal. It's a hell of a lot cleaner to burn than the crap they dig up in West Virginia. Everyone screaming acid rain ain't willing to pay the price for shipping Wyoming coal." We drove on past the mine and further across the prairie. About ten miles further east we saw a large herd of antelope and a handful of horses.

"Those wild horses?" I asked.

"Oh, I suppose so," said Leonard with disgust in his voice. "More like ill- behaved renegades. All they are is old ranch ponies gone feral. You'd think the way people carry on about 'wild mustangs' that they belonged here."

"How's that?"

"Well, shit. Everyone talking about ecosystems and native species. Shit, the damn horses came here with the Spanish. Not a damn native bone in their body. Hell, if it weren't for the wells we develop for sheep and cattle, there wouldn't be ten of them left standing." He kept talking, "BLMs got their head so far up their ass we had to go in on a suit with the fucking horse lovers just to get them to manage them properly."

"What are you talking about?" I quipped.

"Hell yes. Back in the late seventies. Group in Boston. Called themselves the 'Friends of the Wild Horse' or some such nonsense. I flew out there and talked some sense into them. Said look, the BLM is so scared by all your propaganda that they have allowable numbers set

too high for any body's own good. Horses will overgraze the range just as quick as sheep or cows. What good does it do having them eat themselves out of house and home. So we made a deal and agreed on an allowable annual carrying capacity for horses sheep and cattle and then the three of us sued the fucking BLM."

"Who?" I asked.

"Rock Springs Grazing Association, Rawlings Grazing Association and Friends of the Wild Horse. That fellow back in Boston was a smart bastard. Had a good lawyer. Hell, that case set a precedent across the west."

"What do they do with the horses when their numbers get high?"

"Adopt-a-Pony or some such nonsense. Costs the BLM more than they earn. Hell, I tell my cowboys if they shoot a horse they can keep the money. Horse will get damn near as much as beef these days. $25 as of yesterday."

He pointed to a coyote loping across the road ahead of the truck.

"You know we take care of this desert. I built more wells and developed more springs than any damn bureaucrat. And I don't see any environmentalists who have a hard-on for antelope out there setting pipe in the heat of summer when a well runs dry. Damn cry-babies. They love seeing the antelope out in their imagined wilderness but the minute you point out hundreds of them drinking on a well or tank developed by a drilling rig they start screaming, 'The roads! They'll get shot near roads!' Never mind the rig hasn't been there in ten years. They want everything to be the way it was before white folks ever came to this place. And that's not very realistic now is it. Because no matter how dirty wrong and ugly our history may be, it happened. If we hadn't slaughtered them poor Indians, they would have slaughtered us. Hell, who could blame them mean as we are." He looked over at me and laughed.

We drove to his ranch, the Little Bar X, and he showed me the abandoned old cabin there where he sat out a blizzard one year. He didn't eat for two days. He showed me the sweat house where they brought their sheep to sweat which loosens their wool before shearing. "Got out of sheep when the shearers went to electric clippers. Electric clippers are

hell on animals. Couldn't stand to see the sheep get so banged up. Besides I was too cheap to rig power out so far ." He smiled at me and winked.

We drove out of our way back to a high spot ten miles East of Bush Rim, a place he called the Palisades. I could see back to where I'd been the few days before.. The Wind River mountains stuck out to the north and away to the east we could see xxx mountain and the eastern side of the Great Divide north of Rawlings. He pulled the car over and turned it off. "I never told anyone this before. But sometimes I like to come out to this spot and just sit and look." He sat for a minute and I didn't say anything. "I love it here. I will come out and park the car with Freddy, and we'll just let the day slip by for a spell. I can see farther from this point than anywhere else I know. Why, I bet you can see the entire Red Desert from this very spot."

I said "Yes sir, probably so."

I drank his little dog Fred's water and he said we could stop at a well and get some more. I told him I had to take a leak. He said, "Fine. You piss on a bush, and I'll piss on the truck. That'll show them fucking Japs!"

As we drove south and east he showed me the vast network of oil and gas wells that are checkered all over the region and we drove the roads that connect well to well. He showed me how the compressors separate the water from the oil and gas and how they rig large tanks next to the gas wells collecting residual oil called "condensate" because it is collected through a refrigerated condensation process. He told me how disgusted he was with so many of the producers in the region because they draw their wells down too fast. Not only does it artificially inflate supply by putting gas on the market sooner than normal, but the process leaves too much gas in the ground, something he believed to be wasteful and uneconomical. "Only reason the bastards do it is they got their money leveraged out so far they want to show their investors a big quick return. Finance the next deal. God damn greedy bastards." I could only smile and nod my head.

When I first met him I had no idea who he was. I didn't know he was the richest man in Sweetwater county, the second richest in Wyoming. He told me that he and his brother

owned the controlling shares in the Rock Springs Grazing Association. It wasn't until later that I looked at a map and discovered that they controlled surface rights to approximately 2.8 million acres around the Rock Springs region. I had heard and read about such entities; I had heard and read about men like Leonard Hay.

He told me the story of his grandfather who'd crafted a deal with the Union Pacific Railroad back in 1909, way before the General Land Office had even imagined the BLM. He said his grandfather told Union Pacific they had too much land. Believed that other than needing the land right under their tracks they'd been given more land than they knew what to do with. So in that part of Wyoming, Union Pacific turned all their residual acreage over to two entities, The Rock Springs and Rawlings Grazing Associations. The associations were granted all surface rights to more than two million acres and the railroad wisely kept all the mineral rights. But Leonard's grandfather arranged it so that if a company came in and mined or drilled, the grazing associations would receive a 2% royalty for surface displacement. I thought about the billions of dollars worth of coal, oil, gas, and trona that has come from the basin over the last seventy years and quickly imagined the small fortune a 2% royalty represented.

I don't know if Leonard ever assumed I knew about the railroad land grants. Did he care that I knew that in the 1800s the U.S. Congress gave the railroads every other section of public land in a series of fifty mile-wide swaths clear across the continent, from the Mississippi river to the west coast? It was an effort to speed and promote development and effectively made private every other section of public land for twenty five miles either side of the railroad tracks. There were a whole series of these land grants across the West, the Northern Pacific, Union Pacific and Southern Pacific Railroads being the largest beneficiaries. I don't suppose Leonard knew or even cared that I believed these railroad land grants were the biggest political boondoggles in the history of the United States. Not only had the country been swindled of its resources by a handful of rich families and companies, but those very giveaways had taught us as a country to view forests and mountains and rivers as free for the taking. The

difficulty the conservation community has making business and economic interests realize, much less factor in the grave costs associated with resource extraction is because industry never had to pay the price for resources in the first place. We are spoiled rotten as a nation and the Railroad Land Grants are just one prime example of our duplicity. All the talk of free enterprise and free market economies spewing forth from big business and the Republican Party are nothing more than empty rhetoric in the face of such massive subsidies.

Leonard never heard my opinions on the subject of corporate subsidies He never heard my disdain for welfare ranchers. I suppose I interpreted his attitude for environmentalists, his anger and built-in defensiveness as belying his guilt in a way. I mean if the timber and mining and livestock industries aren't guilty of the excesses which they are accused of, then what are they so worked up about? It surely isn't their public image. What people think of them is like so much water off a duck's back.

It's just that I liked the man immensely, which is not the same as agreeing with him. We were on opposite sides of so many issues; yet he still respected my opinion, still appreciated and even looked for a good argument. I didn't have the insight of knowing how he behaved in public, say at a grazing hearing; I had never heard his lectures or rhetoric around a board room. I could guess his politics. All I knew was that he put me in his truck with his longhaired dachshund Fred and drove me all over his part of the Red Desert cursing greedy oil magnates, Japanese car manufacturers and east coast environmentalists. Given my predisposition and view of history; the wrong evil, industrial-minded, murderous attitude which our country was settled, perhaps you can see how easy it would be to just automatically hate a guy like Leonard Hay, a man who has benefited and profited from his control of and exploitation of the land. But here he was on a hot day in August offering me a ride and a tour with his little dog Fred. A friendly man. Respectful of my little knowledge and the possible opinions I held of him.

It wasn't until I sat down to write this that the significance of the location where I met Leonard Hay had in my feelings for the man. There I was in the middle of the Great Divide Basin where both the water and my feelings go nowhere. I wanted things to be black and

white. I wanted to know that there was a clear right and wrong. On the Continental Divide the water runs either east or west. Left or right, right or wrong, the direction is pretty clear. But there in the basin the water goes nowhere. It either disappears into the hard baked ground or withers dissipating into the sun bleached sky. The picture is not so clear as elsewhere.

The basin and Leonard require more patience, more understanding. The western writer and commentator Bill Kittredge has a term he uses quite often; calls something or someone "two-hearted" which I take to describe the way I feel about Leonard and other men like him. The way I feel about so many issues in the west. I feel torn. Torn between anger and sympathy, impatience and compassion. It is a feeling I often find confusing and in my confusion turn to old habits of acting like I know better than everyone else, or worse; pretending not to care. But as I walk along the Divide and am forced to recognize the complexity of the situation and recognize the fact that I do care, I am forced to wonder just what in the hell I intend to do about it.

> **8/2/95 Wednesday, Day 53**
> It is hard to describe the feeling I have after a day when I've taken a ride. It really does feel disconnected, broken up, fragmented. After a couple days straight walking there is a feeling of balance, strength, harmony -- damn that sounds so cliche'd. But after taking a ride like yesterday (with Leonard Hay) I feel at loose ends, disconnected. How I feel is exactly how one might guess you'd feel riding in a car after so many days afoot. Fractured is the word that comes to mind.

Leonard drove me right to the small two-pump filling station that constitutes the entire town of Red Desert, Wyoming. Behind the white cinderblock building there are two brown derailed boxcars, a large olive green with white picket fence trailer home and a closed-up mechanics garage. Nothing more. The spare improvements are set on the side of the frontage road not twenty five yards from a wind-blown and barren section of I-80. And though it was August 6th and the first hot dry weather I'd seen all summer, as we pulled in, all I could think of was how brutal it must be like there in the winter.

Leonard told his dog Freddy to stay in the car while he pumped gas and I hauled my pack out of the truck bed and shuffled it over to a white-wash wall, propping it against the

station. A small white-haired man in blue Levis and a white t-shirt walked out of the station looking disinterestedly at me. He seemed intent on Leonard like he recognized him, and so I interrupted, grabbing his attention.

"Are you Marvin Killian?"

"Yes"

"I'm Woody Beardsley. I talked to you last Spring? Sent a box of food here."

"Oh, yeah. Sure. You're a day early, huh?" I was going to tell him, well, yes but he seemed interested in checking Leonard's progress.

"Afternoon, Mr. Hay," he said like an underling to a boss.

"Well, hello." said Leonard

"I'm Marvin Killian, Mr. Hay."

"Sure. Sure. How you been? How's your wife, Marvin?"

"Oh, she's good."

The two stood looking at each other as trucks droned by on the Interstate. Then breaking the silence, Leonard said, "Say, did you know this fella walked here from Montana?"

Marvin looked at me squinted up his face and smiled.

"Yessir. But he drove here with you," he said almost more interested in how the two of us had come to meet than that I'd arrived by car.

"Did my box arrive?" I asked a little uneasy.

Marvin's small narrow eyes squinted in a wry smile and then in a curious high-pitched giggle he very deliberately said, "Well, yes and no. It arrived, but it's not here. It's down in Wamsutter at the Post Office. I'll call and have my son-in-law pick it up on his way back from the bar."

"Great," I said.

"Bring your things inside," he said. So I followed him into the flat roofed cinder block station. The first thing to strike me was the heavy mothball smell of urinal cake that seemed to beat down the dry dust from outside. I looked about as my eyes adjusted to the low light.

There was a counter with a cash register, some shelves, a half dozen dusty quarts of oil, a wire snack rack with two pink Hostess marshmallow coconut snowballs left on it, four bar stools, and a glass fronted stand up refrigerator all arranged in no particular manner.

Leonard came in to pay for gas and seeing Marvin on the phone he walked over to the upright "Quick Fix" refrigerator and said, "Let me buy you lunch." He slid the glass doors open and pulled out three white plastic wedges with cellophane windows showing off their days-old tuna salad on wheat interiors.

"Why, Thank you, Leonard."

"You better eat two," he said. "You're a big fella, and I get hungry just thinking about that backpack."

He was right. I was hungry and I popped my finger into the cellophane, fished a sandwich half out and made short work of it in about three and a half bites. We sat looking out the window at the hogs by the boxcar barns, listening to Marvin on the phone. It was nice for a minute in that grubby little gas station, the two of us watching each other eat. Then quiet, chewing, Leonard got back up and got two Mountain Dews out of the refrigerator.

"I like this stuff almost more than Coca-Cola," he said putting one in front of me.

"Thank you, Leonard."

Marvin hung up the phone and took a stool on the other side of the counter from us. He sat sort of slouched with his head tilted sideways so he could see below the giant plastic cigarette dispenser that hung like some pregnant fish about to spill guppies above his cash register. Marlboro Country. He sat there in a manner that suggested custom and comfort even.

"Yer box will be here shortly," he said with a grin. I noticed for the second time that his eyes were tiny, slits really and he screwed up his face in a grin, giggling again in a high-pitchhed whine. He turned to Leonard and said, "Nice to see you again, Mr. Hay. Been a while since you been out to see us."

"Well, that's right," said Leonard. "I usually only come out as far as the Bar X ranch." He was going to say more, but instead there was a long not too awkward silence that seemed to acknowledge how little these two old men held in common living there in the desert.

I couldn't take it.

"Leonard gave me a driving tour of his ranch and the desert," I offered probably too enthusiastically. "Picked me up down by the Jim Bridger power plant. Saved me a day's walking."

Both Leonard and Marvin nodded. Silent. Huge semis roared by on the Interstate. No rhythm to the relentless pace of their traffic.

"Well, sir. I've got to get myself home," said Leonard almost as if by cue. And as he walked to the truck with Marvin and me following him, a late 80s police-blue Buick or Pontiac with chrome bumpers pulled into the station and parked past the gas pumps in front of the trailer home.

"Here comes yer box," said Marvin, looking back at the truck where Leonard was telling his dog to move over. I walked to the truck to shake Leonard's hand and say good-bye, but he'd have none of it. He busied himself with starting his truck and backing it up as if I weren't there. Instead he just talked at me.

"Now, god damn it, don't get yerself snakebit. The country south of here's a mother Fuqua for snakes. And I don't want to be reading your name in the fucking papers neither. All they print is bad news, and that won't do in your case. Do you hear me? Send us word when you make it home. Mary'll be dying to know how it went." And with a quick wave he drove away.

A huge man almost my height wearing a sleeveless leather shirt-vest, black denim pants and square-towed biker boots got out of the Buick and very deliberately put his black truckers cap on his head. He had massive Popeye forearms like a baseball player and they were covered with curly red-brown hair so dense it was hard to see the tattoos on his forearms.

But his massive left bicep very clearly read USMC in green-black letters. He walked over and looked at Marvin and me. Marvin was still watching Leonard drive away.

"God damn, it's fucking hot," said the new man.

"Yeah it is," is all I offered, not sure whether I should introduce myself or not.

Then after what seemed like forever, Marvin said, "That there was the richest man in Sweetwater County. Second richest man in Wyoming." He looked at the new man and me and then back at the road where Leonard had driven away.

"Leonard Hay?" I asked.

He said. "Un huh. Him and his brother are the two richest men in the state, beside the feller who owns Sinclair Gas."

The new big man seemed unimpressed, perturbed even at Marvin for mentioning it.

"Well, if you want, I'll call him back down here and you can give him a fucking blow job, for Christ sakes," he said, angry.

The comment kind of hit me sideways and I remembered Marvin told me this guy had been at the bar.

He had my box under his arm, and he looked at me with a smile, his mood turning as if to say, "just kidding."

"Name's Cherokee," he said lifting his cap with his free hand and pointing out the gold-braid letters across the front: CHEROKEE. "Like the Indians. I'm part Cherokee myself, which is why my mother gave me the name."

"Hi. I'm Woody," I said offering my hand and noting that he looked more German than anything else. He griped my paw as if in a contest and only let go when he felt mine relax.

"For Christ's sake, Marvin. You've got air conditioning in the store. Lets quit standing around in the heat and see what the boy has in his box."

As we started inside I grinned, even laughed, to myself at what Cherokee had called me. I thought of a joke my friend goes into when he's drunk. It's a rant one yells at someone careless enough to call you "boy" It goes something like, "I been from Main to Spain, Austin to

Boston. Seen forty acres of goats, fucking in twenty acres of field. I got enough hair on my ass to knit an Indian blanket, and you have the nerve to call me boy?"

What struck me funny was not so much the content of the inane rant but rather the thought that I might just up and say it to this mean looking ex-marine named Cherokee with the fuzzy forearms and green tattoos. And then I thought to myself, no. Hell no.

He plunked my box on the counter and sat on the stool next to it leaving his heavy arm on top. He wasn't just going to turn it over to me.

"Marvin tell you you're staying for dinner?" he said more than asked and before I could respond added. "Cookin' brisket out behind the trailer right this instant. If there's one thing I know it's cookin' brisket."

With that, Marvin came in with two letters in his hand. They had that familiar personal-letter look which distinguish letters from all other mail. They'd been opened. He said, "These arrived sometime after your box. The wife's been holding them for you." He saw me notice they'd been opened and he squinted up his face and giggled again and said "She all but got 'em read before she realized they wasn't for her." And he turned to Cherokee and the two of them laughed out loud for a good half a minute.

I read my two letters while the two men sat and watched. One letter was a very funny description of the summer's events from my mother and the other a thoughtful note from my sister Adele asking me if I would read at her wedding. The two of them had spent most of the summer planning and arranging Deli's wedding, which was to occur the week I arrived in Colorado. Both the ceremony and the reception were to take place at the foot of Colorado's Gore Range in the main hay meadow of my parent's ranch.

My mother was full of anecdotal news about my father's temper, her concern for rain during the ceremony, contempt for shiftless hay crews who she was sure would never get all the hay up in time. And on top of all this she and my father were building a new house on the ranch and were up to their eyeballs with construction details. There was anxiety in her letter and worry over my father's health. Had they bitten off more than they could chew? Perhaps. I

could not finish reading her letter because the latter half was filled with praise and admiration for what I was doing and her maternal pride was more than my present situation could bare.

"Did Marvin tell you about the two Spics he nearly had to shoot last week?"

I looked up. What?

"Tell him Marvin. Tell him about them two greasy cock suckers you nearly had to blow away."

I looked to Marvin.

He squinted up his face and spoke with the same high pitch in which he giggled. "Yeah. These two beaners come sliding in here the other day. They was drivin a fancy Camero and was tailing this hot little pussy in a Datsun. She'd stopped to pump gas."

"Liked to have pumped that hot little pussy yerself wouldn't you Marvin?" said Cherokee excitement in his voice.

Marvin giggled and said, "She was hot all right. But she weren't more than sixteen and frightened. All but said so way she paid for gas. So I reach below the counter and get out my gun, and I walk out to that Camero, and I look in at the driver and I say, 'We don't serve no Mexican trash so you'll be leaving now.' And they up and left. Never got a 'thank you' from the little girl. She drove away near as fast as they did."

"If they were niggers, you'd of had to shoot 'em," said Cherokee. He was excited and angry again. "Niggers is meaner than spics and they would a never just up and left without making a fuss. All a man can do is shoot a nigger."

I decided he was trying to shock me with all this talk because he kept looking to me to see what I thought of it all. I may have said, "Whoa, that sounds scary," but I mostly tried to feign preoccupation with my letters and box of food.

While I mulled through my depressing stores of dried beans, sardines, creamed honey and crackers, trying to ignore Cherokee's talk of niggers and spics, a fat woman in Levis and a black t-shirt came in. She was breathing hard, and I couldn't tell if she was nervous or out of

breath. Marvin introduced her as his daughter and Cherokee's wife. Cherokee put his big arm around her shoulders and told me her name was Anne. He said, "We was just telling Woody here about them Spics Marvin was going to shoot the other day. He don't believe us though."

I looked up.

Anne began to nod her head. "Oh, it's the truth. We got here just as they was driving away."

"Show him your gun, Marvin." Cherokee said walking behind the counter watching Marvin as he bent from his stool and came up with a .22 rifle.

"This here's the one," said Marvin, just looking at it and blinking.

"That'd a done the job." said Cherokee as he took the gun from Marvin and jacked the lever arm open checking the chamber. "I'll tell you what though, this old thing would never do you if you got held up. What you need Marvin is a riot gun. Two of 'em. Mount one right here under the counter. That way some one walks in with a gun you just blow 'em away fore they know what hit them." He turned talking to me.

"The other you clip right up here behind the cigarette case." He raised his arms with the .22 and motioned where he'd hide a gun. "If some nigger comes in says 'raise 'em mister', you put em up and come down blasting." He looked pleased with himself. "Pump seven shells into that fucking' nigger fore he ever new what happened. That's how we handle the store down in Alabama. I told you I was from Alabama didn't I?"

I shook my head no.

"It's all in how you say it. AlaBAMa! We don't take no shit from niggers down in Alabama."

My head was spinning. How'd I gotten into this? Not a half an hour before I was getting a tour through the desert with Leonard Hay, and now I seemed trapped in this gas station with what seemed a bunch of red necks and me not knowing what to make of or how to respond to all the talk of guns and murder.

"What you need is a riot gun. Marvin, you ever seen my riot gun?" Marvin nodded that he had, but Cherokee persisted. "I should show you my riot gun. Honey?"

No response. Anne was thumbing through an ancient People magazine. Bored. "Anne, honey!" She looked up with a start raising her eyebrows, yes? "Anne, go out to the car and get me my gun so as I can show it to our guest here."

I interjected, "Oh, that's OK. I don't want to be any trouble."

"No. No trouble. Anne. Go get the gun!"

Anne hurried out the door in the rough and cumbersome manner of overweight people. Cherokee and I looked out after her.

He said, "God, I love a woman with some meat on her bones. Don't you? More cushion the better the pushin'."

She took a large set of keys and popped the trunk open on the Buick. Inside was a box that from the gas station looked like a beer cooler and from that she proffered a heavy object wrapped in a white towel. She brought the gun in without unwrapping it and immediately handed it to Cherokee and then looked quickly away at Marvin. He sat there in his half-cocked slouch below the pregnant cigarette case. Uninterested and silent.

"Thank you, dear," said Cherokee as he unwrapped the towel and displayed a menacing jet-black sawed-off shot gun. "This here, Mr. Woody is a genuine Winchester, twelve-gauge, pump action, Wyoming State Trooper issue, riot gun with a fully extended seven shell clip and high action pistol grip. It can go manual or semi-automatic and if you don't think it could stop a whole pack a thieving niggers then think again."

I almost broke into a laugh and the thought of doing so scared me so bad I almost puked.

Marvin whom I'd nearly forgotten was sitting there said, "I wouldn't think twice about shooting a nigger. But that's more gun than I'd ever need." I was stunned.

Cherokee held the gun out in front of me as if to have me hold it. But when I reached out my hands, he pulled it away and said, "Just look."

"It's a beauty," I said.

Cherokee wrapped the black gun back up in the white towel and was silent for a minute. He was watching me. As I busied myself rearranging my pack in the corner of the little store, he came over and sat on my stool.

"I can't understand what it is a fella could hope to accomplish with such a trip. Why the hell are you doing it?" I looked up at him.

"Oh, I don't know. I guess I've always just wanted to cover a lot of country on foot. No real reason."

"I mean I'm a Vietnam veteran and I seen all kinds a crazy shit. But I never known a person to just up and waste their time like that." I squinted my eyes and furrowed my brow in question.

He said, "I tell my own boy you gotta try and make something of your life and not just fritter it away. A man's gotta be able to look back on his life and have something to remember. Something to be proud of..."

I was about to interrupt him when he went ballistic.

"Jesus Christ Anne! Did you fucking turn the meat!" He ran at her violently. A bluff charge which he continued towards the door.

She was startled "Well... no, I..."

"God damn you, stupid bitch! A man can't count on nothin' getting done right. I told you to turn that meat every fifteen minutes or it would dry out, now didn't I? What do you think I meant by that. Turn it every twenty five minutes? God damn it, bitch!" Cherokee hurried out I guessed to go turn the meat.

I said nothing and continued with my packing. Anne turned back to her PEOPLE magazine. Marvin sat slouched on his stool below the Marlboro man.

Cherokee was back in about five minutes holding a bar-b-que fork with a strip of red shredded brisket on it. "Now, try yourself a bite of that," he said holding the fork out at my mouth. I put my hand up to pull off a piece and he said, "Just bite it." And so I bit at it awkwardly with my hands self-consciously at my sides. It was quite good.

"That there's the best brisket in Wyoming this day."

"Yeah it is." I said.

He turned to Anne with a tender look. "You see, honey? I didn't mean nothing. It's just you got to love yer meat." He walked over to her. "You got to love your meat the way I love you." And he put his big arm behind her and grabbed her butt and squeezed and lifted all at once as her weight shifted slightly.

Marvin introduced me to his wife and she seemed pleased to meet some company and she apologized for reading my letters and told me how nice my mother sounded and what a lovely wedding it was going to be. She gave me a tour of their tiny trailer, which was filled with overstuffed furniture and floor to ceiling lamps. She took me back into her bedroom and showed me her storage racks of crochet knitting crafts. She said, "The winters are long here." I told her how nice they were, and she showed me an article from the Casper Star Tribune. It was a clipping with a picture of the trailer we were standing in with a long hang-glider tipped on its nose next to the trailer. She told me the world's record long-distance hanglider started right there on the cliff behind her home and landed somewhere near Scottsbluff, Nebraska. She showed me a card the man who'd done it had sent her. "To Marvin and Juanita, Thanks for the hospitality."

I myself couldn't wait to get out of there. I walked back over to the station and told Marvin and Cherokee I was sorry I couldn't stay for dinner, but I needed to make time down the road. An hour later I hitched a ride out of there with a man driving a U-haul truck towing his car and family from Salt Lake to Arkansas. He was the first customer to stop at the station since Leonard Hay drove off and I just asked him if he minded taking me down the road a way. His wife and kids were following him in a station wagon and they talked every five minutes or so on a child's walkie-talkie they'd set up between them. There was little room in the truck so I rode with my pack on my lap.

He told me he was an army mortician and that he'd spent a year in Kuwait during the gulf war and that the worst part of his job was when a body bag would tear open and the stench would leak out, which he informed me wasn't that uncommon since the government issued body bags are so cheap. I told him that it was lucky for him there were so few American casualties in the war, and he told me he only deals with non-combat deaths. Said I wouldn't believe the kinds of stupid accidents a drunk jeep-load of Marines can have. Said the worst he ever saw was a kid who blew his brains out when his girlfriend sent him a Dear John Letter with a video tape of her doing it on the kitchen counter with the next door neighbor. Said there were ten times more non-combat deaths in Kuwait than there were men killed in action.

He told me he liked living over there because the Japanese sent huge ships filled with Mitsubishi cars, Sony stereo equipment, and fresh fish. It was their part in the unified war effort. He said in the thirteen months he spent over there he drove two brand new Trooper IIs, had a ten disc CD player with automatic remote and ate well over his own weight in shrimp cocktail. He said hell, he even met his wife there. Said she signed up as a wartime pen-pal and wrote him for at least nine months before they ever met in person. I told him I'd read about people falling in love through the mail but that I'd never met anyone who had.

They let me off at a truck-stop on the edge of Rawlings, Wyoming. It was just getting dark as I stepped into the glare light of the flat oil-stained concrete pumping pad. I helped myself to chicken-fried steak and mashed potatoes at the all-you-can-eat truck drivers' buffet and stayed the night at a Comfort Inn watching an HBO movie and David Letterman on the tube. The windows in the room didn't open and I felt I couldn't breath and I tossed and turned all night feeling very anxious and claustrophobic.

The night before I'd slept out under the stars listening to sage grouse and burrowing owls. But this night I had the hum of the air -conditioner and the consistent drone of semi-trucks on the Interstate. How had I let that happen? In one day I'd ridden nearly eighty miles down the Interstate and somehow found myself stuck or attached to it like a desperate fly on a Shell no-pest strip. News and fuel hurling by at the speed of light.

I dreamt of dead fish. Great rafts of deteriorating flesh on the ocean floor. Drift-net fleets on the high seas. Japanese ships dumping plastic garbage on Saudi Arabia. TV-guided smart bombs targeting Latin America ghettos. Mobile rigs and drilling derricks on the wide desert horizon. Cars in traffic. I had visions of Rush Limbaugh and Patrick Buchanan calling for gated communities and more funding for prisons while I myself spoke to large audiences of black inner-city youths telling them to quit wasting their bullets on each other and do drive-by shootings at Starbucks coffee shops instead. I was whacked.

In the morning I got up late and walked to town without my pack. I needed to mail some letters and I didn't want to drag it with me. Rawlings is a bleak oil-patch town that sits on the eastern rim of the Great Divide Basin. It is the kind of town kids grow up in wanting to leave. It has about it a colorless feel, like pictures there are all in black and white. There is a new federal prison on the outskirts of Rawlings and I walked by the entrance to it on my way into and out of town. At one point I guessed it was shift-break for the prison guards because traffic increased on the road and a number of new cars went by each being driven by a large person wearing a brown uniform. The drivers were big muscle-bound men, and I imagined a deal the governor made with the University of Wyoming Cowboy football coach for his players with no chance of going pro. Most of these cars were brand new diesel v-8 Dodge Ram trucks. And when I walked by the prison for the third time that day I thought of the men who worked inside. I wondered if it ever dawned on them to organize a carpool and drive to work together instead of by themselves everyday. And I walked on out of town laughing at myself and my pathetic naiveté.

Home Stretch

For two days I walked on dirt county roads in the sage country south of Rawlings, Wyoming. I was sore at myself for having taken such a big ride the day before and I walked along in a funk. I was aware that the rides I'd taken alleviated three days of walking and I was angry at myself for taking them. I was pleased to have met Leonard Hay and I'd seen parts of the desert I might otherwise have missed, but I was still miffed. I told myself that was the last ride I'd take for the rest of the trip. And the minute I did I knew that in four or five days I was due another break in Steamboat, Colorado, and would be getting a ride then. I told myself it was the distance that mattered. If I got a ride away from and back to the same trailhead that didn't represent a change in the total distance I walked; therefore, such a ride was OK. All of which is silly. My concern over walking versus riding was a trick of my mind tied somewhere to a notion that I had to walk the whole distance. I don't know where it came from. Probably some hidden macho agenda or peer pressure.

What I wasn't recognizing was that I didn't like the breaks in my trip. Yeah, I was always glad to get to fatty foods. But every time I took a break, ride or not, I came back feeling out of sorts and somehow not part of myself. What I liked so much about this hike was the time away from cars and kitchens and stores and television. The trip seemed almost like time away from myself, which is disturbing, and as I write it, sounds corny and contrived, and I immediately get pissed off for even trying to relate it. I want to tell anybody listening or reading to fuck off and mind their own business. Which only begs the question, "So why write it down, Woody?" Why indeed.

8/4/95 Friday, Day 55
There are lavender blue bells, pink lupine-looking sweet pea(?), yarrow, huge yellow balsam root and numerous other

> flowers all around. Wonderful tall grasses of at least three or four different varieties. Lavender asters, sage, sarvice berry and Aspen trees all around. The clouds broke West of here and the pale green of the sage hills looks wonderful in the alternating shade and sunlight. It has started to sprinkle for no apparent reason. This has been an amazing summer. here it is August 4th and the Wyoming desert sage country is still green. Amazing.

My friend Andy Baur is a short, stocky man with a quick smile and unflappable good humor. We met in tenth grade when we were fifteen on my second day of high school and were instant friends. We have made numerous road-trips, hikes, rides and camping trips in the years we've known each other and subsequently have a pretty good handle on each others quirks. He has endured mountains of my childish trail behavior, temper tantrums, laziness, and never-ending banter and has always proven a delightful entertaining companion. I was looking forward to seeing him. He had been tracking my progress all summer from his job in Steamboat Springs and had arranged to meet me near Bridger Peak in the Sierra Madre Range of southern Wyoming. The plan was to walk from there back to Steamboat.

He didn't make it to the designated meeting spot by dark so I left a note on a rock cairn I built in the middle of the trail. I'd had a very long difficult day covering about four or five thousand feet of vertical and was quite tired. And as I drifted off to sleep that night just West off the shoulder of Bridger Peak, Andy and a friend Mike Olsen woke me up with confused laughter and shouts.

"Wood! Wood!"

"What!" I shouted trying to sound pissed off.

"Where the fuck are you?" Andy's dog Nelli began to bark and growl at me. She was scared.

"Nelli you spaz. It's me." I said as I unzipped the tent and she bolted in licking my face. "Hello, nice girl."

They got to the tent at 12:30 full of apologies for being late. I told them not to worry about it that I'd sat in the tent and watched a lightening storm to the north. I pointed out the

towns of Saratoga and Encampment, Wyoming which were the two small clusters of lights below us to the East. They hadn't eaten and were starving so they whipped up a batch of beans and rice and I joined them for my second supper that evening.

The next morning I was slow getting up and Andy and Mike started to tease me.

"What's the matter with you? You're supposed to be Mr. Mountain Man after a summer like you've had."

"Oh, really?" I replied. "Well tell Mr. Mountain Man to go fuck because Mr. Wimpy here is going to sleep a little more."

Finally it was guilt that worked as Andy, exasperated said, "Cmon Wood. I only have three days and I didn't come here to lay around."

So I got up and broke camp. Mike walked to the highway with us and hitched back to the car he and Andy had stashed the night before. He had a bum leg and was going to meet us at a trailhead outside Steamboat in three days. I'd take my last break and re supply for the end of the trip. Andy and I continued for the next three days hiking to Colorado.

We had wonderful easy hiking for three days with little or no weather. We zig zagged back and forth across the Continental Divide as we walked into Colorado. We hiked up the headwaters of the Encampment river a tributary of the North Platte and into the Zirkel Wilderness. Neither of us had been in that part of the country and were glad to see it.

We both thought I was going to experience some sort of epiphany crossing the Wyoming Colorado border, but it didn't happen. Instead we ran into some tourists with Wisconsin Plates at a trailhead. They asked us about hiking in the wilderness and where you go to get a permit. I told them you don't need a permit to hike in the wilderness you can just go where you want. They replied, "Yeah. But what if something happens to you. How would anyone know how to call your mother?"

I said, "That's the beauty of it. No one out here is going to call your mother." They drove off in a huff. Andy and I looked at each other and laughed.

"Can you believe how rude they were?" I joked.

Andy said, "What do you expect Woody. You look like a lunatic." I smiled and turned, walking triumphantly down the trail.

I spent two days in Steamboat wishing I weren't there listening to the news that Jerry Garcia had died. It happened the night we got there, and I went to the grocery store and bought a pint of Ben and Jerry's "Cherry Garcia" ice cream to pay tribute to the man. However, news of his death seemed all anyone in the busy resort town was interested in, and all I wanted to do was get moving again. I'd arranged to meet my sister on Rabbit Ears Pass and would only need two days to get there from where Andy and I had stopped the day before. I don't know why I didn't just head back out and kill a day sunning by some high alpine lake but I didn't. I guess I felt obligated to my friend Andy for making the effort to come hiking with me, so, exhausted, I spent the whole day asleep on his couch. Tired as I was I was growing restless or anxious about the coming end of my trip. I don't think I wanted it to be over and I was only one long week from being done. I'd gotten so I quite enjoyed being alone on the trail and felt a terrific enthusiasm for where I was and all I was seeing.

The next day I caught a ride back up to the Schoolhouse trailhead near the headwaters of the Elk River and hiked my way back into the Zirkel Mountains. I was amazed to discover I was still seeing lupine and shooting stars this late in the summer. It was one of the great advantages to covering various types of terrain. I walked into and out of alpine, sub-alpine and desert habitat almost daily and it seemed I'd been hiking in wildflowers all summer.

In the morning I hiked to the top of Lost Ranger peak, a mountain in the southern end of the Zirkels that is right around twelve thousand feet high. I made good time getting up there and I arrived feeling strong and energized. From the top of the peak I could see most of the North half of the entire state of Colorado. The Rahwah Range, The Never Summers, Longs Peak and the Indian Peaks Wilderness. Mt Evans, Bierstatdt, Grey's and Torreys and the Gore Range. Mt. Holly Cross, the New York Range, and the Flat Tops. All, all were visible in one sweeping glance from the top of that mountain. I was thrilled. There is something amazingly

rewarding in being able to see so far and recognize so much of it. It seemed I could recognize everything in sight.

For the first time I could see the end of my journey and a strange satisfaction swept over me. My parent's place sits at the base of the Gore Range and I could all but see Brush Creek, the drainage they are on. I could see the route I would cover over the next five days. Buffalo Pass, Rabbit Ears Pass, the Routt Divide, Gore Pass and Elliot Ridge were all as clear as day. And even though I'd been sorry about the pending end of the trip I couldn't help but be excited. I was swept up in a wave of pride for myself that I had never before felt and I thought I might cry. I started jumping up and down and whooping "Yee Haw.".

Another party of about ten people approached the summit and I walked over to talk to them. I was so psyched about what I'd discovered that day that I had to share it with someone. Amazingly when I got to the group I instantly recognized their leader. It was a woman I'd known from years before working in Steamboat Springs. Joan gave me a big hug and explained she was leading a Sierra Club hike there for a week in the Zirkel Wilderness. I told her and the group about my trip and I told them how excited I was to be there with a view of my parent's home. So wild to meet this woman I know on top of a mountain. I walked with them for half a day back to their camp. They fed me soup and cocoa while we waited out a storm. I thought my energy and delight might last forever, but it didn't happen that way.

Two days later walking along a logging road on the East side of the Routt Divide I looked up and saw the waning moon against the blue daytime sky. I realized in a week it would be a New Moon. So when I got to the top of Gore Pass I stopped in the little picnic area they have on the side of the highway and wrote a poem for my little sister's wedding. I called it New Moon because I realized her wedding was exactly one week away. I was pleased with myself because I liked the poem and the idea of reading it at the wedding was pleasant.

I approached a large rock with metal plaque on it wondering what was on it. It read:

Gore Pass. Altitude 9,000 ft. Here in 1855 crossed Sir St.
George Gore. An Irish Baronet bent on slaughter of game and
guided by Jim Bridger. For three years he scoured Colorado,

Montana and Wyoming accompanied usually by forty men, many carts, wagons, hounds and unexampled camp luxuries. More than 2,000 buffalo, 1,600 elk and deer, and 100 bears were massacred for sport. A trail by 1866, a wagon road by 1874, this modern highway opened in 1956.

Erected with the citizens of Routt and Grand Counties, 1956

I thought what a strange sign to put up. It didn't ask why they went ahead and named the pass after George Gore anyway or why he had a mountain range named for him. It was simply a small quiet protest the good citizens of Routt and Grand had the courage to erect. It made me think. It made me glad I was alone. It made me glad I had no gun. It made me glad there were no roads paved hard in my honor. No mountain peaks carry my name.

The next day was perhaps the most difficult and emotional of my entire trip. I knew I was one day away from home and I was growing excited. It dawned on me that I was done with the hike and I'd not come to any major discoveries. I suppose I realized that whenever I finished would be another day just like any other, a fact that lent a certain anti-climax to the end of the journey. It also happened to be one of the more physically challenging days I'd had since I'd been hiking in the Wind River Range. I spent the night in a grubby State Park campground near the town of Radium on the Colorado River. A number of river rafters spent the night there as well, burning a huge bonfire and drinking beer. They never invited me over for a beer, and so I sat there in my bag watching them. The next morning after no sleep, I hiked from the river to the top of Elliot Ridge which crests out on the North edge of the Gore Range. It was a total distance of about twenty miles and all of it was uphill covering almost six thousand feet of vertical.

I was hiking the backside of the Big Piney drainage where there are two or three very large summer ranches up against the National Forest. I ran into a group of cowboys moving cattle onto a forest permit. The cattle were hot and tired, and they were noisily bellowing as they moved down the road. As I climbed the road toward them I grew angry at the thought of them banging up the pretty green meadows shitting everywhere and wearing down the little

creeks and parks. There must have been a couple hundred of them and I was in such a bad mood by the time they were onto me that I just stayed right in the middle of the road. I thought they'd scatter up or down around me but they weren't even phased. They barely noticed me and instead bumped and jostled, pushing past. I had to wave at their heads and slap their tough sides shouting "Hey" so they'd move around me. I don't know how I kept from being stepped on. There was a cowboy riding a gray horse at the back of the herd and he just watched in disbelief as I popped out of the back end of the herd startling his little cow dog which hadn't yet seen me.

He said, "Well, shit. I seen everything. Weren't you scared of them ornery old cows?"

I looked up at him still angry, my fierce walking pace set on my brow. "Fuck, no. They're too dumb to be scared of. Only one thing dumber in the world than cows, and you're sitting on it." And I put my head down and just kept walking past him. I would have felt guilty for being so rude but I was in a terrible mood. When I'd gotten a full switchback above him, I stopped and drained my water bottle. I didn't take my pack off but I could still hear the cows on the hill below me, and I yelled out "Buenos fucking dias Cowboy Small!" And then I turned and headed on up the ridge.

As the road switched back to the south, way off to the southwest across the forested slopes of the Gore Range I could see the Eagle River valley. There against a distant mountain backdrop I could see open vertical swaths in the trees. I immediately recognized them as the ski runs at Beaver Creek; part of an expansion of the greater Vail Valley Resort. I knew there was an entire city there at the base of those slopes, a whole world outside my line of vision. I knew there were huge second homes and condominiums, golf courses, gas stations and a huge WalMart shopping center all unimaginatively plopped down along the Interstate. My family had gone camping there when I was a boy before anything was there. My father hadn't told me it was a scouting trip.

I kept hiking up the hill.

An hour or so later I had come to the crest of Elliot ridge at the base of Sheep Mountain and I notice immediately there was a series of clearcuts and a road all the way up to tree line. I was furious. As I hiked along I clenched my jaw and shook with rage. I imagined the Forest Service and all their rhetoric declaring this glaring mess an appropriate form of "Silviculture". I thought to myself, "Silviculture" what kind of asshole dreams up a word like silviculture? I wanted to kill all the silviculturists in the world. Better yet, I wanted to break into their offices and slit their throats with my pocket knife and write "stupid ignorant fucks" in their blood on the wall above their desks. I was so angry I wanted to force feed every housewife in America a blue Tidy Bowl chlorine toilet cake and then videotape each one of them as they writhed and squirmed, blue foam frothing out their brain. Send the tape to MTV and let every angry teenager pick out his Mother floating bloated in the gray pool of sewage that is American culture.

Whoa, boy. What the fuck is wrong with you?

My legs buckled and I pitched to my face in the green duff in the ditch beside the logging road I'd been hiking. I was all but pinned by my pack and I had to roll over like a beached tortoise on its back to unbuckle my waist belt so I could sit up. I started laughing and I yelled out. "Ugh!" And then I started to cry. And I cried and I cried and I cried until I had nothing left inside me. I got out my journal and wrote some stuff down.

> **8/16/95 Wednesday, Day 67**
> Rage! Brutal murderous rage! I am Sitting on Elliot Ridge crying like a baby. Hurt, exhausted, confused.
>
> I thought about the beavers we saw when I was a boy up on Meadow Mountain. We borrowed this Mexican guy who worked for Vail Associate's truck and busted-up the oil pan on a rock. We went hiking and camping. We saw beavers slapping their tails on a pond in the last pale pink light of the evening. Two of them. I wonder what happened to those beavers. Did they and their pond disappear?
>
> They named that place Beaver Creek. They built huge luxurious Republican condominiums there. They built lift service for ex presidents and the Secret Service. They hold celebrity ski races and golf tournaments there for self-absorbed Aryans and all their gear and cameras and desperate clamoring for attention. Attention they cannot begin to get from the television.

> And the beavers? The beavers probably waddled away -- amazing how far you'll find them from water sometimes. That or they were squashed by a big D-8 or a dredge the Army Corps of Engineers and the EPA and my father or his employers Vail Associates decided was a good thing for building a ski area . They knew so little about themselves they assumed it was a good thing. Why, look at all the people now taking advantage.
>
> Yeah, just look.

Walking down onto my parent's ranch was strange. I was at the end of the line, and yet there was nothing keeping me from just heading out and continuing south. But that had not been part of my plan. I arrived in mid afternoon and marveled at the big new house set out in the dirt. No landscaping yet around it. There was no one there. "Yoo Hoo," I yelled. I put my pack down against the fence of the old house and started to walk towards the new one. A cleaning woman with a bag of rags in one arm and a vacuum cleaner in the other emerged from the side of the garage.

"You looking for Pam?" she said.

"Yeah. Is she around?" I asked.

"Nope. She's down in Denver. They're planning a wedding."

"So I heard.."

"Can you imagine planning a wedding and building this place at the same time. My lord. I've never seen such a house. Can you imagine such a thing?"

"No I can't," I said smiling. "You know when she'll be back?"

"Maybe this evening. Her son is due to arrive..... Oh. You're him. You are the one who hiked here from Montana."

I smiled as we both looked over at my pack leaning on the fence. "That's me."

"I'm sorry. How rude of me. I hope you don't think..."

"Don't worry about it." I said.. "I feel the same way."

She smiled and very friendly said, "Don't mind me, I'm only the crazy cleaning lady. Your Mom said she'd be back this evening. She's a nice woman. I'm sure it won't be long" And she loaded her things in her van and drove away.

I wasn't home long before I got swept into the events leading up to my sister's wedding. My father and brother and I were kept busy picking up hay and laying out space for the large tents and marking off places in the meadow for people to park their cars. My dad went crazy for three days trying to keep the cows off that part of the meadow so none of the guests would have to step in shit. My brother and I swapped turns at riding down there bareback and shooing them through a far gate. The fences were down for haying so all we could do was push them off and hope it took a while for them to return. It is funny to admit but I felt at peace with all these things. I didn't need to be angry or critical of anyone for anything. I could just enjoy the beautiful weather and the quiet pleasure of doing simple chores.

And then there was the wedding itself. My mother and sister had worked very hard planning it. It was a beautiful affair with a large white tent and flowers set out in the freshly cut meadow. My sister was beautiful in her simple pearl-white sleeveless dress and long blonde hair, her new husband David smiling happily in his blue coat and vest. Both families participated in the wedding with my brother and sister and her husband and myself all standing at my sister's side. I read them the poem I had written the week before about the New Moon and was pleased to have it well received. As I looked out over the crowd of familiar faces, I realized that in a funny way the wedding had been a huge part of my whole summer. It was like the target at the end of my journey, and I had told almost everyone I met along the way that my sister was getting married and I had to get there in time. The thought made me smile, and I stood there beaming at how fortunate I was that Deli and David had let me share their celebration as part of my trip.

Two days after the wedding, I went for a long ride with my father on the National Forest above the ranch. I told him I was interested in finding an aspen tree that I could carve my initials in and commemorate my hike. Which seems like such a funny thing to me now. He

thought it was a great idea and so we rode up off the Gore trail and I followed him into the woods. We rode back way off the trail away from where anyone might see it or find it. Though it strikes me as funny now, at the time it seemed the most private and intimate of acts.

He found a group of large thick trunked aspens and he said "These are the ones I remember. See one you like?" And I picked one that was clean and had no markings from hungry winter elk.

"This one will do," I said as I rode my horse up next to the tree. And he dismounted and grabbed my horse's bridle and held him still so I could concentrate my effort.

"Here," he said, handing me his pocket knife. The bugs were bad and I am sure he was getting bitten. But it was quiet, and he said nothing. The big roan gelding I was sitting on stomped his leg impatiently at the flies biting his belly, and I carved this on the tree as my father watched:

G.L.B.
Chief Joseph Pass, MT to here
1180 miles on foot
6/12 -8/17/95

When I was done Dad gathered his reins put his left foot in the stirrup and swung his right leg up over his saddle. He screwed his hat down tight on his head and turned up the collar of his jacket. Large cold drops of rain fell one at a time through the trees showing wet dark spots on his back. His big dunn-colored horse stood quietly underneath him. He turned to me and said, "Ready?"

As we rode down off the mountain through the aspens and fresh-cut hay a certain quiet sound surrounded us. It's as if something was telling us a story without having to say any words. I'm not even sure I heard it myself. but it went something like:

Maybe what this country once was
was too big for us to imagine.
Perhaps it was more than we could get our minds around and so
we had to divide it into little parts that we could tax and comprehend.
And now that we have rendered it useful

and we can imagine it something tangible,

we are seeing it as far less than it once was.

Depleted even.

And this may lead us to see ourselves as less than we once were.

Which, however difficult, may be our saving grace.

Because maybe we could come to realize

we never were that big a deal in the first place.

Which seems the first step toward right living

and might even make us laugh.